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Editorial

Language, traditions, customs, ways of life, festivals, art, folklore... — all these are considered as constituting the culture of a people. But there is more to culture. The beliefs of a people, their value system, world-view and symbolic universe (of which religion is a part) are integral elements of culture. They interpret and at the same time are expressions of the traditions and way of life of a people. All these elements of culture can be made objects of study and analysis. But that would be to make culture an independent entity, cut off from real life; it would be an apolitical culture.

Experiences in our country and all over the world have brought more and more the political dimension of culture to the central stage. The people are the bearers of a culture, and cultural identity means today a political entity. Political developments in India and South Asia as a whole is today very much centred on cultural identities.

In this context, this number of *Jeevadhara* attempts to study some of the issues of culture in its political dimension. Yvon Ambroise presents us a theoretical discussion on whether culture is a liberative or alienating force. Discarding the positions which consider culture as an epi-phenomenon and part of enslaving false-consciousness, he maintains the need of studying culture as a relatively independent system which has a liberative role in the political, economic and cultural spheres. Grass roots experience demonstrate how culture can not only be a formidable motivating power, but also a mobilizing force for political, social and economic transformation.

The contribution of John D'Mello shows a particular instance in our history of the transformative role culture plays. He explains how Mahatma Phule of Maharashtra through various strategies re-interpreted culture to give self-confidence to the powerless and lead them to transformative action. D'Mello uses the study of deviance as an interpretative key to the understanding

of Phule, and in the same spirit makes pertinent observations for renewal in moral theology.

S. M. Michael, on his part presents us the cultural experience of the oppression of women, and he culls out elements from the tribal culture that could be of great support in the liberation of Indian women.

The article of Amaladoss after studying the inter-relationship of religion and culture concludes that culture (as well as religion) cannot be the monopoly of the elite; culture must be seen in the context of a movement of the people; it must find expression in symbolic actions that would involve the whole community. Mary Pillai takes up the study of culture in relationship to the elite, upper classes and castes who play a hegemonic role. She analyzes the traditional roots of cultural hegemony as well as its present political manifestations in the Indian context. She underlines the politics of power involved in the exploitation and control of mass media. In my contribution I try to reflect on the global question of culture from a Third World perspective.

The various articles of this issue have thus cumulatively contributed to the understanding of the politics of culture, each one reflecting from a particular perspective and with a particular focus of study. It is hoped that they will be of some help to all those who are involved and concerned at the micro and macro levels for the cultural and political transformation of our society and the world.

Tiruchirapalli

Felix Wilfred

Changing Culture and Religion

The relation between religion and culture, seen in the context of liberation, is a very complex one, because both operate at the level of symbols and meanings and it is not always easy to distinguish one from the other. The question becomes even more involved when value judgements enter into the picture. The Marxists would consider religion alienating and an obstacle to progress. The process of secularization seems to make culture impervious to any influence from religion: one might tolerate religion as a private pursuit, but denies it any space in the public sphere. On the contrary, the promoters of religion seem to look on culture as something limited, even sinful, that needs transformation: religions need to challenge culture. But at the same time one also feels the need to inculturate religion: religion cannot ignore culture. All would agree that both religion and culture have changed in the course of history. However, there may be disagreement regarding the factors that induce change, particularly the possible mutual influence in promoting such change.

I propose in the following pages to explore such mutual influence between religion and culture. But given the variety of ways in which these are understood, I would like first of all to clarify briefly what I understand by culture, how culture can be situated in relation to other elements that constitute society, especially religion, and how do culture and religion influence each other in the dynamism of social life and history. Some of these terms are used in the other articles in this issue. So my own description may be redundant or complementary. But for the sake of my own argument, I need to have a clear, agreed starting point. I would like to keep the reflection at a general theoretical level, though I may be referring more often than not to the Christian tradition, since that tradition provides the context in which I am reflecting.

What is culture?

Culture is the symbolic system that people construct to make their world, life and society meaningful. One could analyse it in terms of three broad constituent areas: a world view, a system of values and a body of ritual. The world view organizes the material and the human world into a meaningful whole. This finds expression, explicitly and implicitly, in myths of origins and ends, in stories and parables, in the creative arts and literary productions, in philosophical and theological reflection, in the way social relationships and life are ordered and lived. It opens out to transcendence in some way. In so far as the world view is not simply a picture of the world but a guide to life and action, it is complemented by a system of values that indicates certain norms that govern life and points to goals to be pursued. Human dignity, justice, fellowship, peace etc. are values that not merely call for respect, but also indicate expected patterns of behaviour and goals to be pursued through life. Of course people may have a world view and pursue values that we consider wrong. For example, some one may deny transcendence (world view), see wealth and enjoyment as the only goals of life (values) and may be ready to oppress and exploit others in the pursuit of these goals. One can see that world views and values are closely related.

A world view and a system of values, though they eventually condition individual behaviour, are normally shared with a group. Culture is communitarian. Culture, though it can be explicitated into consciousness, is normally at the unconscious level, taken for granted as evident, till a particular element in it is challenged by encounter with another culture or other element of society. Rituals and celebrations embody in communal symbolic action the world view and values of a particular culture. They also help to interiorize it, express it and confirm it. Thus a national day parade helps to create and affirm national identity. Initiation rites, not only indicate the particular identity of a group, but also help the initiate to interiorize it. A community celebration shows and strengthens the social relationships in that community.

Culture and society

In order to understand more clearly the role of culture in society, we have to look at the other elements that, together with

culture, constitute society. I do not have space here for an elaborate analysis of society. I can only give a few broad indications.

One could analyse society into six elements grouped in three pairs: economics-politics, person-community, culture-religion. Economics refers to the relationships of people to the world and to others with regard to production and exchange of goods and services. It is not difficult to see that attitudes and relationships may differ between an agricultural and an industrial society. Marxists would speak of primitive, feudal, capitalist and socialist structures of production. Politics explores the relationships of power. It is traditional to speak of monarchic, oligarchic and democratic societies. Normally economic and political power seems to go together. People who have power also control the ownership of the means of production. In modern societies, politics may become a profession; but usually they become or are at the service of the economically powerful.

The relationships in the community may be influenced by kinship, ethnicity, race, caste, language etc. Kinship is normally studied as an element of culture. But in most modern societies which include many ethnic and other groups social organization seems to have a broader and more independent scope. A person, however conditioned by the surrounding social structures, remains a free agent. One reacts to these structures in function of one's psychological needs and strengths. One's reaction need not merely be conforming; it can also be creative. As a matter of fact, any change in structures starts with a creative individual who becomes the leader of a movement. A certain talk about classes might ignore the important role of individual persons in any social movement and change.

Religion and culture

If culture as the pole of meaning in life and community includes also religion, within culture religion is concerned with the ultimate questions. Since the Ultimate is seen as transcending a particular community or situation, religion has a special identity and autonomy within culture. This is particularly so because ultimate questions are triggered by experiences of 'limit' situations like death and evil, both as suffering and as sin. These experiences lead people to find explanations in terms of origins and ends, often

expressed in the form of myths. Such explanations can also be claimed as revealed. The phenomenon of revelation strengthens the autonomy of religion with regard to culture.

As an explanation of an existing situation, especially with regard to its origins, religion tends to legitimate cultural and other structures. This seems inevitable, in so far as religion needs the mediation of culture for self-expression in symbolic structures and institutions. But the awareness of sin and limitation also leads religion to be prophetic in the light of the goal that one is tending to. This may be a source of tension in religion itself between its institutional and charismatic elements, represented by persons or groups. This prophetic dimension is even stronger in religions that claim a revelation or an enlightenment. We shall come back to this culture-religion dialectic later. Here I am just looking at it in the context of an analysis of society.

The six elements that I have indicated involve and influence mutually one another. The Marxists will see the economic and political structures as basic and everything else as superstructures conditioned by them. The Weberians would tend rather to emphasize the centrality of the cultural pole in influencing choices in economic activity and political organization. I would rather tend to think that the influence is mutual and dialectic and we need not determine, *a priori*, which is more basic. The predominance of one or other element may change with changing circumstances.

The role of culture

There is an adage that says: "People make culture and culture makes people". I have said that culture is a system of symbols through which people find meaning and structure their experience of the world. In this, experience is primary. But experience itself is not simply the brute reality of the material world, but as it is structured by production and power relationships and as mediated by the psycho-social perception of a community. The symbols of culture are created by a community in the context of its experience of itself in the world. Here we see a dialectic between the human creativity of the community and the conditioning by the experience of the world. People may give a particular meaning to symbols. But the symbols themselves are drawn from experience.

For example, in an agricultural community the sun, rain, seasons etc. are important. Their symbols too are drawn from these realities. Their social life is organized around the seasons. The powers of nature on which they depend may even be deified. They live close to nature, which is bountiful. There is a certain sense of equality among the people. As the community gets more organized and cities and trade develop, we have a more feudal set up. Nature is still important. But even the relationship to nature is mediated by the leader who represents the people. Social organization becomes hierarchical. The leader may be divinized. The relationship to the divine is symbolized as a hierarchical one between persons. In an industrial society, nature becomes an object to be dominated and used. Human symbols become more important than natural symbols: imposition of hands rather than anointing with oil. There is a secularization of religion and a desire for democracy and participation. Thus one's view of the world and one's view of the other keep changing according to one's primary experience which also conditions the kind of symbols which are popular.

While the experience of nature and the human provide the material for the symbols with which people construct their cultural world, it is the perspective of the Ultimate that provides the values that not only govern action, but also challenge some aspects of the world view. We could take the contemporary ecological awareness as an example. People who live from nature's bounty or by agriculture have a close relationship to nature and, as I had suggested above, might even divinize it. The advance of science and technology looks on nature as something that can be controlled and used for one's own purposes. Nature then becomes an object to be exploited. Some think that the Biblical doctrine of creation has contributed to the desacralization of nature. People who are guided by a value system that only emphasizes consumerism and selfishness, not only monopolize nature's bounty, but also abuse it without consideration for others or for the future. Religion can challenge the value system behind consumerism and suggest that the bounty of nature is to be shared by all humanity, present and future. A holistic cultural outlook that does not dichotomize between matter and spirit would suggest that, even if we do not divinize nature, it still deserves respect as a gift of God and a mediation in God-human and inter-human relationships. Such a cultural and

religious perspective with regard to nature may lead to the search for and the use of appropriate technology and participatory development. This might also lead to a more democratic approach to problems and to their solutions.

I would like to draw from this analysis two conclusions that are relevant to our discussion. First of all, culture plays a mediating role between the value challenges of religion and the realities of the socio-economic and political structures. Religion can have an impact on reality only in so far as it succeeds in changing culture, that is to say world views and value systems. From the other direction, culture tends constantly to be shaped by the changing socio-economic and political structures. One could say that effective cultural change would not be possible without corresponding socio-economic and political changes. I think that it is needless to discuss which element in the system is basic or primary. In a system, change in one element affects all the others. Any changes that affects only one element quickly gets marginalized. In the past, speaking about liberation, we have asked for change of economic and political structures or we have preached the change of hearts. We have not stressed the change of cultures that mediates between the heart and the reality.

Human mediation

The second conclusion that I would like to highlight is the central role played by human being(s). One talks often of structures in the abstract. They become real and alive only in personal and community experiences. What I have said about culture is true of all aspects of human life: "People make life and life makes people". Structures do not change themselves. The socio-economic and political structures do not automatically change culture, nor does culture by itself transform socio-economic and political structures. People have to interiorize new cultural perspectives and make them effective and people have to introduce appropriate technologies and new patterns of community organization. 'People' is of course a general term. What it involves is that some individuals who wish to change, take the leadership and build a peoples' movement around themselves that leads to a slow transformation of the whole society. This reflection applies particularly to religion. Institutional religion tends to be conservative. There is no prophecy without prophets, even if some of the

prophets may belong to the institution. But prophets alone cannot achieve much by way of transformation if they cannot provoke a peoples' movement.

Does religion change culture?

If we look at history, the capacity of religion to transform culture does not seem too obvious. One can take the example of two social realities, namely slavery and caste. Paul did say that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is no male and female" (Gal. 3:28). Yet it took 18 centuries for the institution of slavery to be officially abolished in the Christian world, and the Catholic Church did not take an official position on it till the Second Vatican Council. Other forms of slavery continue. Exploitation and discrimination of foreign workers is common even today. Women are still fighting for equality, and racial discrimination has not disappeared. The principles of human dignity and equality remain an ideal. Christians accepted slavery as a social structure. Culturally, a principle of hierarchy was understood as the normal form of social organization. When there materialized a strong movement to abolish slavery, it was led by 'marginal' Christian groups like the Quakers and secular humanists. (Incidentally, one of the influences in the development of the Gandhian practice of non-violence can be traced to the Quakers.) One can verify the conclusions I had suggested above. It is not a mere coincidence that the abolition of slavery came at a time when an industrial mode of production was slowly replacing huge agricultural plantations that needed mass labour. On the other hand, the values of human dignity and equality did not become effective for social transformation till they were embodied in a movement animated by a group of people who sought to act according to their convictions. The secular humanists may not have been 'religious', but they also were following an 'ultimate' value in the defence and promotion of human dignity and equality.

The caste system in India is a similar example. The creation story in the Vedas according to which the four *varnas* emerged out of four parts of the creator's body is probably a post-factum legitimating story rather than the origin of the caste system. The theory of *karma*, though it may have been developed as an explanation of the problem of evil, came in handy to justify

hierarchical divisions in society. The system has withstood the egalitarian perspectives of the Buddha and of the various Bhakti traditions. Islam and Christianity have succumbed to its influence. Contemporary secular forces have not made a dent. Now the caste identity is being exploited as a political force. But on the other hand the basic socio-economic relationships related to the division of labour is breaking down under the impact of industrialization and modernization. The only force for transformation in this context will be a broad-based peoples' movement that will reach out to the whole community.

The role of religion in changing culture

After these clarifications we can raise the question again: In what way does religion change culture? Within the culture-religion complex, religion represents an element of transcendence in terms of origins and goals. From this point of view, it always shows another dimension to life, especially at moments of importance to community or individual, solemnized in ritual. The impact of this however may vary according to the closeness of the link between religion and culture. At the level of popular religion, the relation between religion and culture is very close. It is the legitimating aspect of religion that is predominant. Anthropologists have shown that in some ritual situations like initiation or pilgrimage or some seasonal festivals like *Holi* there is an element of anti-structure, which shows the relativity of the existing structure and even challenges it. But the challenge is not in view of changing it. It is limited to a well delimited sacred space and time. Once this particular moment passes the situation comes back to its normal state. One has had a fleeting glimpse of the ideal world. This glimpse seems to have no more than a cathartic role. It does not call for a transformation.

Let us take, for example, the pilgrimage to Sabarimala or Pandarpur. There is a sense of equality among the pilgrims. Caste distinctions are transcended for the moment. There is a sharing of life and participation in worship. But all this happens in a special sacred time: from the time that one decides to go on the pilgrimage; and in a special sacred space: the pilgrim route and the temple itself. One could also talk about a sacred situation. The equality and fraternity are affirmed, not in mutual relationship in day to day life in the world, but in relation to God, before

whom all are standing. Caste as a social system has not been questioned. This is also true of the *Bhakti* traditions. Equality is affirmed, not at the level of society, but in relation to the availability of salvation. God is equally gracious to all. Equality therefore is primarily an attribute of God's saving kindness. Such an affirmation of equality at the religious level could coexist with a strong affirmation of hierarchy at the social level, since it does not really matter with regard to one's ultimate end.

This difference between the social and the religious spheres or the secular and the sacred is further refined and strengthened by the great religions. A great religion has its origin either in a revelation or in the reflection and experience of a person. Though the Vedas are claimed as revelation, Hinduism can be said to become a great religion with the Vedanta, starting with the questioning and reflection of the Sages reported in the Upanishads. The reflection leads to the discovery of the *Atman-Brahman* as the Ultimate reality, which relativises every other reality. One can pray then: "Lead me from the unreal to the Real..." Similarly Buddha's meditation leads him to the enlightening realization of the passing nature of all reality and the need to do away with the desire for them. By relativizing all reality, including life and culture, a great religion transcends culture. That is why it can associate itself with many cultures. At the same time, a great religion cannot have any impact on people and life without being inserted in a particular culture. Beyond this need on the part of the great religion, there is also another need on the part of the people. Religion provides answers, not only about the after-life, but also about the life here and now, especially in limit situations like sickness and urgent personal or social needs. This is the source of popular religion that caters to the life of every day. A great religion therefore co-exists with one or more popular religions as it does with one or more cultures. A great religion relates to a popular religion as the transcendental to the pragmatic aspects of one religious system.

The consequence of this complexity is that the prophetic call tends to focus itself on the transcendental aspect, leaving the pragmatic aspect to continue as usual. Thus a Buddhist or a Hindu may normally live with all sorts of social and need-based rituals in a religious context. An ordinary call to conversion is only a personal moral call that demands a change of one's motivations

and behaviour, but within the social and cultural system. These are not challenged. A more radical demand calling attention to the relative nature of the world and life leads the person to become a renouncer. That is to say, he abandons the socio-cultural system altogether and is not challenged to change it. The present world and socio-cultural order is accepted as relative and even sinful. But the call is not to change it but to abandon it. Thus the prophetic challenge of the great religions also leaves the existing socio-cultural order to continue as it is.

If religion as an institution is so inculturated that it tends to be conservative and if religion as prophecy encourages rather a withdrawal, can religion have any role at all in transforming culture? Here I would like to recall what I have said above about human mediation. Neither religion nor culture exists in themselves. They are dimensions of human life. It is people who make and change culture. And when people set out to transform culture, they can find vision, motivation and inspiration in the transcendent perspectives of religion (or another Absolute). We see this in the liberation theologians and activists, in the humanists of the secular world, and in the *karmayogis* of the Indian tradition. Therefore our question has to be rephrased. We should not ask whether religion can change culture. We should rather ask whether religion can be a source of inspiration and encouragement to people who wish to transform culture.

The process of change

Human mediation in change therefore seems essential. The starting point for any change is the dissatisfying experience of people. People are shocked by an unjust or oppressive situation. They want to change it. They question the existing structures. It is here that a wider vision comes to their aid, both to relativise the present structures and to project a vision of a possible future. Change will occur while this vision does not remain merely an ideal projection, but inspires action at various levels. At the level of economics and politics such action will have to be mediated by the appropriate social and human sciences. At the level of culture the mediation is assured by symbolic action. Gandhi's non-violent movement for freedom for India is a good example. His symbolic actions like the making of salt in spite of a law prohibiting it, the burning of foreign cloth, and the civil disobedience movement created a new awareness among the people of their

own self-worth and freedom. Such symbolic actions act, not only at the conscious level, but also at unconscious levels. As far as religions are concerned, the rituals can be such symbolic actions, if they themselves can be liberated from the legitimating tendency of religion and integrated into a movement for change. To recall again what I have said earlier, ritual will not become such a challenging and liberating symbolic action, if it is not the celebration of a revolutionary praxis at socio-economic and political levels. Social and cultural change must go hand in hand. Therefore, a movement of the people for social change seems to be the context for an effective cultural transformation. Social change itself will not have any lasting impact if it is not interiorized through a cultural transformation.

Culture changing religion

I have been talking so far only about religion changing culture. In concluding these reflections I would like to raise the question whether culture sometimes challenges and transforms religion. I do not have the space here to go into this question elaborately. I shall only offer a few lines of enquiry. Because religion as an institution tends to get too inculturated and to legitimate culture, any change in culture owing to socio-economic and political developments induces a rethinking at the level of religion. The advance of science not only brings about a new attitude to nature, but also purifies the pragmatic aspects of religion. Industrialization, the workers' movement and socialist ideology precede the social teaching of the Church. It is the experience of poverty and oppression that gives rise to liberation theology. Thus problematic situations and experiences tend to provoke people to discover the prophetic aspects of religion. Similarly encounter with another culture challenges not only cultural but also underlying religious assumptions. Thus the reformistic movement in Hinduism is less a direct reaction to Christianity as a religion, but more to European culture, in the shaping of which Christianity has had a role.

Conclusion

In concluding, I would like to stress again the centrality of human mediation and the importance of a context of a movement of the people for cultural and religious change. Theologians of liberation often speak of the Basic Communities as the key

element in liberative action. Without under-emphasizing their importance or usefulness, I would like to suggest that any movement of change must somehow involve a whole people. At some stage it must become a mass movement. Culture and religion are not the possession of small elite groups. These groups might help as dynamic focal points. But they will have to open out to involve the whole community, transcending conflicts that merely divide the people. Only the community, under appropriate leadership, can change itself and the cultural and religious horizons of its life.

Taking the problem of caste oppression as an example, one can say that egalitarian attitudes at the level of religion have not helped to change the system. What seems necessary is the need to promote common symbolic actions that are affirmative of equality: for example, inter-dining and inter-caste marriage at the social level, and collaboration in common action at the economic and socio-political levels. Commonly celebrated rituals and festivals can help to change people's cultural assumptions progressively. Such communion may not be possible or realistic till the economic and political status of the oppressed people are improved. Affirmative action may help towards this. All along there must be an effort to involve every one. Promoting conflict and violence can only radicalize division and make groups defensive. Industrialization and urbanization in so far as they undermine the traditional mutual division of labour and dependence may be helpful processes. A certain secularization may promote the purification of religion in its pragmatic aspects structured around the theme of purity/pollution.

Liberating culture, in both its senses of religion liberating culture and culture liberating religion, is therefore meaningful and possible only as a dimension of a social movement in which the people set out to transform themselves and their society.

M. Amaladoss

Tribal Culture and Women's Liberation

The Indian women have been suppressed for centuries for ideological, cultural and religious reasons. Further, in the contemporary world, the dignity of women is under a great threat due to modern technology and medicine. The modern medical discoveries while helping the good of humanity are also being used against women.

Various techniques of sex-determination and sex-preselection have been discovered during the last twenty years¹. The techniques such as sonography, fetoscopy, needling, chorion biopsy and the most popular one — amniocentesis are increasingly becoming common names in India.

The amniocentesis tests are conducted mainly for sex determination and thereafter extermination of the female foetus. This perverse use of modern technology is encouraged and boosted by money-minded private practitioners who are cut to make a woman 'a male-child-producing machine'.

Three sociologists conducted micro research in the Bijnor district of U. P. Intensive field-work in two villages over the period of a year, and an interview survey of 301 recently delivered women drawn from eleven randomly selected villages in two community development blocks adjacent to Bijnor town, convinced them of the fact that 'Clinical services offering amniocentesis to inform women of the sex of their foetuses have appeared in North India in the past 10 years. They fit into cultural patterns in which girls are devalued. Earlier, female infanticide was limited to Rajputs and Jats who considered the 'birth of a daughter' as 'a loss of

¹. Ammu, Abraham and Sonal, "Sex² Determination Tests", Women's Centre, Bombay 1983.

prestige'. But now the use of amniocentesis for female foeticide becomes prevalent among other communities too².

Several investigative reports published on amniocentesis in popular magazines like 'India Today', 'Eve's Weekly', 'Sunday' and other regional language journals reveal that between 1978 to 1983, around 78000 female fetuses were aborted after sex determination tests in our country³.

As against over a thousand female fetuses discovered in a Bombay hospital elsewhere and later aborted, only one male fetus was removed selectively according to the findings by two women activists in Bombay⁴.

India had a legacy of killing the female child (*dudhapiti*) by putting opium on the mother's nipple or by putting the after-birth over the child's face or by ill-treating daughters⁵. A survey by 'India Today' revealed that in Tamilnadu in the Kallar community, mothers after giving birth to baby girls are forced to kill the babies by feeding them milk from poisonous oleander berries⁶. Most likely, researchers could also find cases of female infanticide in parts of western Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh⁷.

The nutritional status of children in Punjab was studied by CARE in 1974, and the results are truly revealing. Throughout the pre-school years, malnutrition was higher in the females. Again, according to Dr. Ghosh, boys are generally breast-fed for a longer period than girls. This is supported by Miller who says that the inferior feeding of girls is more marked in North India than in the South⁸.

The oppression of women in India will be still more clear from the increasing dowry-deaths and bride-burning. In the Capital, Delhi, a woman's life, usually a bride's life, is snuffed

2. Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon, *A Micro-research on Amniocentesis in the Bijnor District of U. P.*, 1984.

3. Sonal Shukla and others, "Abuse of New Technology", *Seminar*, No. 331 (1987) 14-15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 15; see also Vidhuti Patel, "Amniocentesis - Misuse of Modern Technology", *Socialist Health Review*, 1, 2 (September 1984) 69-71

5. Alice Clark, 1983, quoted in Sonal Shukla and others, "Abuse of New Technology", *art. cit.*, p. 16

6. *India Today*, 15.6.1986.

7. see Barbara D. Miller, "Female Infanticide", *Seminar*, No. 331 (1987) 18-21.

8. Modhumita Mojumdar, "Land of Starving Mothers", *Ibid.*, p. 34

out at the rate of one every 12 hours or 2 a day⁹. The petty tyranny begins with the kind of gifts given to the marital kinsfolk which were either insufficient/incorrect or that some members were left out, etc. Dowry is thus tribute extraction by the stronger wife-taking household from the wife-giving one. Even a cursory observation of the behaviour of men and women during a wedding will reveal distinctly the humbling and cringing attitude of the wife-givers towards the wife-takers. Thus, the practice of giving and taking dowry is as old as the history of the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian civilizations, only its forms have been changed.

Both custom and religion wiped out even the existence of any option other than marriage for women. And, it was every man's duty to ensure his daughter's marriage before she got "soiled" by other undesirable men or even those who lived within the extended family. This made marriage the only socially approved and compulsory social arrangement, canceling out any other autonomous life-style for women; their options were closed and still are, as seen in the incidents of young unmarried girls committing suicide to avoid humiliation which arise due to the inability of the parents to pay the required dowry.

The practice of child-marriage ensured the marketability of the child-bride with virginity and dowry eliminating free consent in the matter, let alone other options in life. Thus, the man who marries her becomes simultaneously her greatest benefactor by redeeming her from the ignominious state of *abhagan*-hood. Literally, he husbands her: takes charge of her, harnesses and controls her, her labour, her resources, her sexuality, her fertility, and her very life. The Sanskrit word for husband is *pati* and the popular usage has been *malik*, both meaning master, lord.

Against all these, there is a new consciousness emerging in different parts of the country with regard to the identity of women. This is very clear from different powerful and affirmative feminist movements. The feminist movements call for the complementarity of woman and man, in a male dominated society — a society marked by aggression, violence and war.

At present many of these feminist movements ape the Western model by imitation and following, without much realizing

9. Nina Kapoor, "The Ritual Murder", *ibid.*, p. 28

that there are indigenous resources. The tribal society, for example, could become a model and example for the liberation of women in India.

Fragmentation of human society and women's movements

Behind the search for a new identity for women in the modern world is the growing fragmentation of humanity. This lack of integration and the overall orientation towards unity give rise to the two most powerful movements of today, namely the ecological movement and the feminist movement. They are powerful affirmations of unity and at the same time a protest against fragmentation¹⁰. The ecological movement challenges the one-sided emphasis of the relationship of the human person to nature in terms of domination and control. It promotes the importance and the necessity of harmony between humanity and nature. The feminist movement, on its part, calls for the complementarity of woman and man.

Tribal society is an integrated society

The tribal society has been living in this harmony and integration for centuries, though now it is being disturbed. For many centuries the tribals have lived in the mountains and forests and they have used all the potentialities which nature gave them and they were satisfied with what they had. Whatever they needed for their sustenance they drew it from nature. Even for their spiritual and intellectual problems they found satisfying answers in their mythologies and religion.

The tribals normally live and feel *very close to nature*. They know every plant and every animal and in their natural ecology they are aware that they should not over-exploit nature. Among them it is a law that the products of nature should be used sparingly. They do not waste the things of nature and do not destroy nature. We often hear that the Shifting Cultivators have cut down the whole forest and thus caused soil erosion. But it is important to realize that this happened only in the near past because of the rapid increase of the population which led to large scale immigration to virgin lands and the soil could not recover any more.

10. Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East ? Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement*, Chair in Christianity, University of Madras, Madras 1991, pp. 22-23.

The tribals who hunted with bow and arrow hunted the animals of the jungle only at certain times and only to have enough meat for their nutrition. They did not indulge in pure killing for the sake of pleasure but only killed just to have enough meat for food. They also cut down trees but just that they needed for building their huts or to make implements and furniture. Thus they used the environment sparingly. There is a harmony between nature and tribal life. Accordingly, the tribal world-view and religion are centred around the physical environment in which they live. The tribals' feasts and festivals are the concrete expressions of this harmony.

There is still another lesson which the Adivasis can teach the people: It is that the feeling of *solidarity for the family and for their tribe*. The tribals do not generally believe in the hierarchical principle of Hindu society, i. e., a person's status is fixed by his birth in a caste. The tribal society is not organized on the basis of occupation by birth. Among the Hindus each occupation is linked with certain notions of purity and pollution. Accordingly, different occupational groups are ranked in the caste society. The tribal society is organized on a kinship basis. The tribal spirituality is based on mutual help. Production of goods are meant to enrich the whole tribal community¹¹.

Complementarity of man and woman in tribal society

The integration of the tribal life with nature and society reflects the harmonious complementarity of man and woman in a tribal society. In tribal society, women are not drudges or beasts of burden, but exercise a firm hand in family matters. The tribal women, to a great extent, enjoy a considerable measure of equality with their menfolk. While the great Hindu law-giver, Manu, lays down that a woman, from her cradle to the grave is to be dependent upon a male — in childhood on her father, in youth on her husband and in old age on her son — for a woman is never fit for independence¹², the tribal unconventional laws and customs and manners give *equal status to woman*. In tribal society, the women, far from being slaves have an effective say in the management of the house and they could assert their authority

11. see Stephen Fuchs, *Das Leben ist ein Tanz: Lieder der indischen Ureinwohner*, Benziger 1990.

12. Manu, V, 147–149.

when their husbands try to interfere in their jurisdiction. They are as free as their menfolk.

As most of the tribal people were very poor and they depended mostly on agriculture, hunting and collection of edible fruits, roots and leaves in the neighbouring forests, it was really difficult for them to manage everything without the help of their women. In fact, they were in need of the help of their womenfolk at every step of their life. Women went along with men to the jungle, to collect flowers, fruits, roots and leaves. They actively helped them in agricultural activities.

Naturally, they enjoyed much independence, unlike their non-tribal sisters, who were mostly dependent on their menfolk and confined to their homes. They were the real mistresses of their household affairs. It is true that they did not usually enjoy any political influence and were not allowed to sit in the village councils or panchayats. Nor was their voice heard in taking decisions affecting public life. And, they were debarred from taking direct part in many socio-religious ceremonies. Still they were quite influential in the socio-economic life of their society. Almost all the tribals had softness for their womenfolk, and they were treated with affection and sympathy by men.

Thus, both in theory and practice, the tribal women always enjoyed a better position than the non-tribal women, both Hindu and Muslim.

The birth of a daughter was never regarded as a curse in a tribal family. The widows among the tribals were not helpless as those in caste society. She never gave up her feeling of independence and confidence. She hardly lamented over her widowhood. This position was possible because of her inborn virtues, viz, self-dependence, a spirit of confidence to carry on her livelihood, and above all, her right to re-marry and to lead again a normal married life.

Unlike in caste society, where women suffered untold misery due to the dowry system, the tribal girl was given money to be married. For example, among the *Kolam* tribe in Andhra-pradesh, the boy has not only to bear the entire expenditure of the marriage, but he has to present new clothes to the parents of the girl. Even in marriage by capture, the desire of the girl is ascertained and then only a quick marriage is conducted without

elaborate ceremonies. If a particular girl or woman determines to marry a particular boy, she can straight away go and enter the boy's house and will not leave until the marriage is solemnised. This marriage by intrusion is in vogue among Kolams, Gonds and many other tribes in India¹³. *We hardly come across any news of dowry deaths among the tribals.*

Tribal culture and women's liberation

In today's industrialized world there is a growing threat to the dignity of woman. This is the continuation of the cultural assault perpetuated on women. Over the centuries, the caste society has sought to legalise this 'violence' in ritual, in customary law, in whatever way they could find, denying woman her normal rights, whether in property or status or access to an independent life. The caste women themselves were deeply affected by the patterns of living created by their inferior positioning and tended to accept their lot with resignation as being natural and normal. And they realised that these were for their protection against male aggression.

Against this attitude and treatment, there is a new awareness emerging with regard to the real complementary identity of women. Employment and empowerment are often presented as the means by which women can find their own individual identity. But role models for women are confused. At one extreme stands the ideal of the 'good home-maker, mother, wife' calling for inward-looking, self-effacing behaviour. At another extreme is the image of the independent 'employee', outward-looking and assertive, at least in relative terms. Managing conflicts between these roles is upto the woman. Here, the tribal culture offers an identity for woman as an equal partner, a person complementing equally with man. Is it not time to learn something beautiful from the simple tribal life for the new identity in the brave new world of gender equality?

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13. Mohan K. Rao, *The Kolams. A Primitive Tribe in Transition*, Booklinks Corporation, Hyderabad 1990, pp. 115-116.

Culture: Liberating or Alienating?

1. Introduction

The past two decades have seen a new interest in the study of culture in its various perspectives. This interest has produced important works in humanities and social sciences. Perusing through these studies one can discern an analytical focus on the interpretation or explanation of culture as well as the changing focus of culture in the modern and post modern society. In this article the emphasis will be on the former rather than the latter, namely, on the analytical focus.

We shall here deal with one function — the liberating or enslaving function — which culture can play in society. We need to see whether theoretically culture can play either of them (liberating or enslaving) or only one of them in a capitalist society. This concern and debate has been a very serious one especially among the social activists who recognize today the force of cultural elements that play an important role in the task of empowering people. This debate is all the more accentuated against the Marxist position that has been giving mostly an enslaving function to culture as part of a superstructure in a capitalist society. This debate becomes still more interesting in the wake of the decline and collapse of Communist regimes and citadels of Marxism. Having thus defined the focus of our study we intend to share some reflections on this subject.

In order to have a theoretical grasp about the function of culture as a liberating or enslaving one we need first to define culture that has manifold meanings for different persons and in various schools of thinking. Then we need to give the different theoretical positions of both sides. In conclusion we shall propose the actual role culture can play in organizing people, its liberative potentials and its consequences for the social activists today.

2. What do we mean by culture?

There are numerous definitions of culture given from different perspectives. We would like to give here a rather *descriptive* and *functional* definition. Culture is the set of answers towards the challenges human beings face in this society due to the constraints and contradictions arising out of the relationships to supernatural power, nature, members of same community, individuals in the community and to oneself. Hence it pertains to the way of life, ways of coping and living together, patterns of responding to forces around, values, attitudes, patterns of thinking and behaving, that have evolved over the years. Culture expresses itself in various dimensions: *symbolic* (religion, myths, art forms, archetypes, stories, language); *social* (way people organize their communities, their economic and interpersonal relationship); and *technologies* (means used to bring about these patterns of behaviour; medicine, agriculture, architecture etc.).

It is at the level of *symbols*, however, that culture is perhaps the deepest. In this sense efforts are to be taken to understand the symbolic, the invisible and the inarticulate aspects of culture. Faith, religion and the value system possess both these visible and invisible aspects. For example, faith can be expressed in a set of values, embodied in a spirituality; can be articulated as a theology, and manifested through rituals and prescribed actions (religiosity). We also like to cite a few opinions on culture, "Peter Berger defines culture as 'the totality of man's products'... These products manifest the subjective meanings or intentionality of those who produced them. The fabric of culture then is the inter-subjective meanings individuals hold concerning the world in which they live. Culture exists only as people are conscious of it"¹. "Habermas argues that the task of cultural sciences is to understand the meanings attributed to objects and events by individuals in concrete historical circumstances... Following both the Weberian and phenomenological traditions he identifies culture as a set of subjective meanings held by individuals about themselves and the world around them"².

Culture is not a static one but rather an evolutionary process and hence it is a dynamic one. Being dynamic it has an

1. Robert Wuthnow, James Davison Hunter(eds), *Cultural Analysis*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1984, p. 35

2. Ibidem, P. 193.

immediate function in life. It gives cohesiveness to a group or community as well as its identity and self-image. Culture can thus play a role that can be either liberating or alienating through a set of values and practices having concrete consequences in day to day life. Whether it is destined to play only an enslaving role in a capitalist society or it can play a liberating role is one of the lively debates of today. We would like to contribute our own critical reflection on it.

3. The problematique explained

There are certain thinkers belonging to positivist tradition attributing a type of mechanistic conception of action and order in society. There are others who, opposing the former, give an important role to the subjective meanings in social life arising out of individuals and members in society and stress on inter-subjectivity or shared understandings on which social interaction is based. It is against this background that we need to see the enslaving or liberating role of culture. The debate in this particular point boils down to two positions: one, the positivist marxist tradition that has attributed to culture in the capitalist society an alienating role that has its consequences on the consciousness of man, bringing about enslavement in day to day life; two, the non-positivist tradition that attributes a possible liberating role to culture in the day to day life of man.

1. Culture as enslaving in a capitalist society

Because of the dialectical materialism as the basis of all dynamics the Marxist position asserted a deterministic role on account of the economic factor producing culture. "Marx and Engels considered it impossible to understand art and literature proceeding only from their internal laws of development. In their opinion, the essence, origin, development and social role of art could only be understood through analysis of the social system as a whole, within which the economic factor — the development of productive forces in complex interaction with production relations — plays the decisive role. Thus art, as defined by Marx and Engels, is one of the forms of social consciousness, and it therefore follows that the reasons for its changes should be sought in the social existence of man"³.

3. Marx Engels on Literature and Art, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978. p.17.

"The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness."⁴ The position of Marx is summed up by Jeffrey C. Alexander thus: "Because Marx directly confronts Hegel's theory, his work allows the different emphases of a mechanistic approach to be particularly clear. The historical materialist understanding of development that Marx creates in his later writings continues to accept Hegel's notion that later stages were immanent in earlier ones. It describes the source of growth, however, not as subjective frustration but as the objective denial of rational interest. The orders in question are economic and political, which, Marx insists, are not subjective. Indeed, Marx postulates a radical dichotomy between "superstructure" and "base", between consciousness and social being. Cultural phenomena, from legal codes and religious ritual to art and intellectual ideas, are assigned to the superstructure and conceived of as determined by the base. To explain cultural phenomena, one should not investigate their internal structure or meaning but must examine the material elements that they reflect. Because culture is determined by forces outside itself, it does not have autonomy in a causal sense"⁵.

The position of Marx reduces culture to be an epiphenomenon or a part of superstructure conditioned by the base. Because of this he argues that in a society where the material base or the economic system is capitalist and hence necessarily exploitative we can have only a culture that can be alienating and enslaving. Therefore he practically identifies it along with ideology and religion and reduces it as false consciousness that veils reality, and hence can only exploit people.

In this position culture is seen only in its negative or enslaving role. Marx's analysis is above all socio-economic and political. He did not have a proper methodology of analysing culture as such. Hence it is the fundamental lacuna of Marxism that it does not permit a good and comprehensive social analysis. Already in 1920's Antonio Gramsci knowing this lacuna improved the Marxian analysis by introducing his theory of ideological hegemony

4. Ibidem, p. 41.

5. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Steven Seidman (eds), *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 2.

where he did not subscribe to the deterministic role of economic system but an interactive relation between the base and super-structure given the peculiar nature of each case. Hence he spoke of organic intellectuals who, according to him, are the intermediaries to bring about the emergence of a counter-culture and counter-ideology with no prior change in infrastructure.

2. Culture can be liberative

The concept of culture is to be understood in a holistic way in the totality of social systems. Just as analysis of the economic, social, political and ideological systems explain the functioning of the system in those particular areas of life, the cultural system explains the universe of meaning systems, inter-subjectivity, identity, self-image and a wide variety of symbolical things in society both in its visible and invisible realities. Hence one has to explore this area of life also in the analysis of society.

Thus culture becomes a relatively autonomous system like other systems in society but very much interlinked and interactive with other systems. One cannot explain the cultural system without having recourse to other systems on which it is grounded; one cannot explain any social system without also having recourse to cultural system. Hence it is an integral part of the social systems and must form part of social analysis. Taken in this integrated and integrative role, cultural analysis assumes its real place and relative autonomy in society.

The specificity of the cultural system lies in the fact that it deals with the value system, thought patterns and mobilising energy for action. Its expressions like traditions, art forms, customs etc. have always underneath invisible realities like value system and thinking patterns. Hence if one can analyse and find out the content of cultural system and its functions one can know exactly its consequences in day to day life and its root causes. Knowing thus the mechanisms and root causes, one can interact with them.

Those who are opposed to positivist and mechanistic conception of action propose that action is motivated by something inside the person — by feeling, by perception and by sensibility. In this approach experience and the meaning of experience become central. Peter Berger, Clifford Geertz, Eaving Goffman, Talcott Parsons, Ferdinand Saussure are some of those who subscribe to this thinking in general, each one having his own nuances.

It is in this perspective that we look at culture analytically. We can examine its role and function as well as the groups that are involved in this process. This analysis can bring out the actual function that culture performs in a particular society, at a particular time with a particular group or groups of people. Since we actually know the basis of the function by our analysis, any one who is interested in bringing about a change can introduce different values and patterns of thinking and bring about a change in action. Thus even if a particular culture has been playing an enslaving role we can transform it into playing a liberative role, and thus enable people to transform their lives and social practices.

4. Liberative role of culture and social action groups

Today this position has been the hallmark of several hundreds and thousands of social action groups. These groups are engaged in the transformation of society at micro, semi-macro and macro levels, depending on how they have created their network. But the basic assumption is that social transformation can be induced not by first transforming the infrastructure but by transforming the values and the thinking patterns of people. Thus without bringing any change in the economic level they are able to work with the poor and the oppressed by changing their negative self-image, value system, thinking patterns and lack of self-confidence through a process of awareness building and motivation. They mobilise the people to take action to change or transform the existing system and bring about changes in their economic, social and political status. Thus through this process several groups have started economic programmes, changed their social status by demanding respect and dignity, acquired political power by gaining participation in decision making at Panchayats.

As per the Marxian dictate, one can bring about a cultural change only by bringing about an economic change. But praxis has proved the opposite, namely, by bringing about a cultural change one can bring about transformation in the economic, social and political position. Several *dalit* groups are daily proving this fact.

The present day praxis very clearly shows that Culture is a liberating factor if one understands and analyses it in the right perspective and uses the proper methodology towards that. Hence

culture is a liberating factor and the most powerful factor towards the mobilisation of the poor and the oppressed towards social transformation. The hundreds and thousands of women's groups who are transforming their economic, social and political position by using culture as a tool for transformation is another witnessing factor towards the above position.

We are also lucky to live in a historical period wherein we witness very interesting factors. Sociological theories have to stand the test of history. Only then can they be considered useful theories. Today the lacunae in the Marxian position and theory are demonstrating its historical untenable character in the events that are taking place everyday.

5. Conclusion

We would like to say that sociologists have started digging deep into the whole system of culture. Several perspectives have been opened up; several analytical frames have been exposed; and several insights are coming forth every day. Far from aiming at concluding judgements and summary evaluations the purpose of this article is to open up new avenues for further reflection and debate that would help us to discover the truth gradually.

New Delhi

Yvon Ambroise

Cultural Hegemony

Its Traditional Roots and Present Manifestations

The year 1991 is gone. Prannoy Roy, in the 'World This Week' programme of Delhi Doordarshan on the 27th December called it 'the most difficult year'. True. This year has made the world stand aghast at the most stupendous events – wars, tragic deaths and political upheavals. The world which has been known as three-tiered – the First, the Second and the Third – gets all jumbled up and disjointed. The ideological constructs on which the Second World countries – Russia particularly – had built up their socio-cultural edifices crumbled down. Mass media project them as out-dated. With their fall, decades long cold (ideological) war seems to have ended, and, in all appearance, there remains just one world Power. The hegemony of the United States of America, which measured swords against those of the Soviet Union, has finally come to prevail.

This is one of the most impressive instances of a hegemonical (ideological=cultural) role, that a powerful social group within a particular nation could play with so much success. The play is so subtle, forceful and efficacious that the world order is lured to fit itself quite neatly into the ideological frame which that group projects as the ideal. The economically limping third world countries are conditioned to get themselves fixed into that frame, if they want to throw away the crutches of poverty. The Third World is being denied access to diverse ways of ordering life and its political, cultural, aesthetic and economic parameters, and being ordered by a world order, which is ordered from one major cultural epicenter in both techno-economic and political terms, especially following the abject surrender of the Soviet Union and the socialist world¹.

1 Rajni Kothari, "Colonization and Counter Culture", *Lokayan*, (Jan-Feb. 1991), p. 6

As for India, Nehruvian socialism and the 'socialistic pattern of society' which he aspired for are now thrown to the winds. Instead, a 'growth-oriented' economic policy of liberalization and privatisation dictated by the IMF and the World Bank and championed by the trio — N. Rao, Man Mohan Singh and Chidambaram — is zoomed. The mass media — the Press, Radio and T.V. — are manipulated to mesmerize the Indian people to accept 'economic growth' that is the increase of Gross National Product, as the ultimate objective. Egalitarian principles are devalued along with the Indian rupee in the same degree and measure. With the introduction of economic liberalism of open market, of benign attitude towards private entrepreneurship — national and transnational — 'social justice' which had been in the air for sometime during V.P. Singh's administration is melted and mixed with that air.

People's organizations and People's movements launched in the seventies with social change as the cherished goal find themselves in a tight corner — cornered by repressive laws, meant for Emergency rule. Another force they have to combat with is politico-cultural. Hegemonical (ideological) in its very essence, religious fundamentalist forces strike their fangs on the social fabric and tear it into shreds. Of these, Hindu fundamentalist ideology sounds foreboding to humanistic values of equity and equality. Moreover it is politically oriented, to seize state power and direct the country in line with religious fundamentalism. Hindu card is its main weapon in a democratic set up of universal, free franchise. Journalism in India, so also the AIR and Doordarshan, is normally found betraying a soft corner and partisanship towards Hindu fundamentalists and their political forum, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

There is evidently a hegemonical struggle within the countries of the Third World between two 'blocs', sometimes explicit and other times latent; one bloc strives resolutely to preserve the status quo of the privileged few and the other bloc committed to take the masses out of the gutter and help them become empowered — to think, to decide, to act and to participate in Nation's life — *Their Life!*

- What exactly is this hegemony? What are its implications?
- Which social group is able to play a hegemonical role? What are its tools?
- What effect and impact does it have on the society at large?

— What has it to do with human bondage and liberation?

— Is the Church hegemonical? If so; how and to what effects?

We shall analyse these questions with India as a case in point.

Hegemony (ideological=cultural) in the Indian context

Hegemony as a concept is the brain-child of Antonio Gramsci². For him, hegemony is ideological. What does 'ideological or cultural hegemony' mean? Carl Boggs responds³:

Hegemony is "the permeation throughout civil society — including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches and the family — of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organizing principle' or world view (or combination of world views) that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the broad masses, it becomes part of 'common sense'; as all ruling elites seek to perpetuate their power, wealth and status, they necessarily attempt to popularize their own philosophy, culture, morality and render them unchallengeable part of the natural order of things.

The agents of ideological diffusion and control are termed as 'intellectuals' who Gramsci categorized as 'traditional' and 'organic'. The former comprise philosophers, priests, teachers, journalists, writers, artists, lawyers and so on. The 'traditional' intellectuals have their roots in the past and would remain attached to the culture and ideology (world vision, value system, moral codes etc.) of yester times. But they could be used to spread a new ideology of the state power. Their area of action is the 'civil society', of which family, educational system, religious institutions such as temple and church, and trade unions are the main structures.

The 'organic intellectuals' on the other hand have the 'political society' (the state apparatuses of coercive and repressive power — the legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary, police and

2 Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, emphasizing on the cultural factor in social dynamics and social change.

3 Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism*, Pluto Press, 1976, pp. 39-41

military) as their sphere of action. They are closely linked with these apparatuses and are engaged in a 'massification'⁴ process. Hegemony defines the link between the mass of people and the leading groups of society - the connection is political in the narrow sense, but also a question of ideas or of consciousness⁵.

Gramsci speaks of a new type of intellectuals — the revolutionary ones who would have to take the initiative on many fronts: raising new questions, introducing new modes of thinking about reality, attacking the accepted wisdom of established intellectual authorities and providing theoretical guidance to emerging mass struggles⁶.

Hegemonical struggle would then mean a conflictual situation: 'Intellectuals' clinging on to the established ideology and inegalitarian social order try to swab away the efforts of those intellectuals who try to mobilize and organize masses to build up a new world order with a liberating world outlook, and a corresponding value system, ethics and everyday life practices. In this process both groups utilize mass communication media, education, and other cultural devices. They also transact in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres. Which hegemonical group will finally succeed, depends on their respective power position — their resources, (particularly cultural) and how they utilize it to develop itself into a social force and as such creating a social base — the mass base.

Hegemonical struggle and the process of liberation

What does liberation mean? To what can freedom be compared? To be free like a bird — to scale the heights of the sky, to dive steeply into the earth and streamline it, to hop and jump, to sing the morning and evening, to have the wide expanse of the sky as the 'lebensraum', the living space, is the dream of every human being, articulated or not.

But the opposite is the lot of many. For them existence is to be caged in — wings clipped and substratum narrowly defined, moving space limited, dictated as to what to speak, and how to

4 Cfr Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

5 Tony Bennett, Graham Martin and others (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Classes*, Open University Press, Reprint, 1985, p. 199

6 Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism*, op. cit., pp. 76-78

speak; to be prescribed what to do, what to have and how *To Be*, and to exist for the pleasure and well-being of the 'masters'. To live a life of bondage, to have a restricted and suffocating existence both at the physical and mental plane is not only individual but also collective. A whole society, an entire people can be in bondage, in mute resignation under the 'hegemony' of a small and specific group of 'intellectuals' who try to increasingly tighten their political and cultural grip on the masses.

Indian people caged in then and now

Indian masses are caged within a rigid hierarchical caste, varnic system, which is structural and cultural. In its classical form, it is a four-tiered structural device 'blue-printed' by a master-mind, Manu. It was constructed on an ideological construct, namely the *varnashrama dharma* which acts as a symbolic representation, life-meaning-giving system, legitimizing agent and a mass-mobilizing force. It gives to each of the four varnic/caste groups distinct occupations, role, status, stages, commitment to normative standards and rewards in life.

The varnashrama ideology is called the 'Bharatiya view of life' or Hindu dharmic ideology by the Hindu fundamentalists. The cardinal principles of this brahminical view of life or world vision are hierarchy, holism and continuity⁷. Hierarchy was engrained in functional specialization for each caste group, in the endowment of '*guna*' or characteristic qualities of individuals of each varna/caste and in the life goal orientation patterns prescribed to the four social (varnic) groups — the brahmins, kshatriya, vaishya and sudras.

Inequalities among castes in role, status, position and power are institutionalized in the varnic view of life and brahminical empowerment itself is an ideological inbuilt device. It is because of this device the brahmins were able to attain eminence and prominence as both 'traditional' and 'organical' intellectuals during the Guptan, Chola, Maratta and Vijayanagar period.

In these ancient Hindu Rashtras, the 'dharmic' ideology was hegemonical, seeping through the socio-economic, political and cultural systems. These Rashtras were varnic and hierarchical

7 Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawt Publications, Jaipur 1986, p. 32

with brahmins at the top, enjoying an incomparable monopoly of knowledge, religion and statecraft. Having close proximity to rulers, they acted as teachers of royal household, counsellors, ministers, royal priests, astrologers, and even commanders-in-chief. Practically the coercive and repressive State apparatuses were under their control. The king may decree edicts but the legal code of the country was Manu dharma (varnashrama dharma) shastra. The learners, interpreters and commentators were brahmins; varnic dharma was rashtra dharma; Manu code was the constitution of the country. The brahmin word was supreme. Prof. Ghurye referring to the Gupta period writes,

"This period sees a great consolidation of the brahmin class, while the degradation of the sudras comes out in marked contrast to the growing superiority of the brahmins"⁸.

Golwalkar, the Guruji of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) observes:

"The basis of our national existence was not a political power .. the political rulers were never the standard-bearers of our society. They were never taken as the props of our national life. Saints and sages (brahmin rishies)... were its constant torch-bearers. They represented the dharmasatta. The king was only an ardent follower of that higher moral authority"⁹.

Organically linked with the monarch, it was just one step further for the 'intellectuals' — the brahmins — to diffuse the 'varnic' ideology, particularly the 'dharma, karma and rebirth' paradigm, which is engrained in the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, in the Puranas and in the Shastras of Manu and Chanakya respectively. This ideology percolated into all the layers of the society across the length and breadth of the ancient kingdoms. Under the influence of the brahmin priests and ministers, rulers built temples which became the most effective medium of brahminical propaganda of varnic ideology. Dance, music and drama and other fine arts like sculpture and painting, were so strikingly employed, with the temple as the stage and space of action. There were *yagnas*; festival and sacred days; pilgrimage and fairs and institutions of popular instruction.

On the other side we have the majority of the populace — the Sudras and the Panchanās (the untouchables = street cleaners,

washermen, barbers, cobblers, grass-cutters, and so on), for whom access to education and to temple worship was denied. Social contact with high castes was tabooed. But together with the untouchables the sudras were given the 'dharmic' and 'karmic' pills to swallow in the form of temple and seasonal festivals, pilgrimages and the amalgamation of brahminical and local gods of the sudras. Under the intoxicating effect, these two social groups remain silent, however much they were dispossessed, deprived, dominated and exploited.

As a result of hegemonical practices of the brahmin 'intellectuals', a social order had come to stay in India with values internally more rigid and subject to greater non-egalitarian sanctions. Caste emerged as a cultural system based on institutionalized inequalities and petrified in the shape of rigid taboos on commensality and other forms of social interactions. The earlier notion of distance between one caste and another, which was mostly based on functional criteria, was accorded a ritual complexion; inter caste distantiation thus became a ground for elaborate distinctions and rationalizations about pollution-purity relationship. Thus hierarchy which was a functional principle became a religious phenomenon¹⁰.

Varnic hegemony, exposed to erosive counter-hegemony

Brahminical varnic/caste hegemony enjoying unquestioned authority and power from the Gupta period of the 8th century B. C. to the epoch-making Vijayanagar imperial period of the 15th century A. D., had to face several counter hegemonical forces. Buddhism and Jainism of the pre-Christian era were a real threat because of the anti-brahminism and the egalitarian socio-moral value systems propagated by these two religions. Brahminical hegemony struck back with the same coin by introducing ascetical practices, erecting temples and schools, and above all by the policy of accommodation and by initiating religious movements. The Bhakti movement has been the most effective tool, used by the brahminical intellectuals for mass-mobilization, and for chasing away the two religions from the very land of their birth.

The other counter-hegemonical forces of the present era are the Muslim rule, the Islam, British regime, Christianity,

10. Yogendra Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, op.cit., p.33

Marxism, anti-Brahmin movements and the people's movements for liberation and for social change. We shall dwell very briefly on the last five forces and on the Intellectuals' manoeuvres to counter them.

British rule and brahminical hegemony

The British regime played a hegemonical role in the socio-religious and cultural spheres, with a distinct and different ideological system — a specific world-view — (scientific and technological), a corresponding value system, ethical and legal code, life style, language and so on. The new economic (capitalist), political (democratic), cultural (modern, rational) tradition, new cultural structures such as education, law, science and technology, new forms of state apparatuses, of politicization, urbanization, industrialization and a new media of cultural transmission through press, printing and facilities of transportation — all have a corroding effect on the caste system.

The British educational policy had pulled down the brahminical absolute and exclusive monopoly of and authority over learning, ruling and governing. Education could now be imparted by teachers appointed on the basis of educational achievement, irrespective of their caste or birth. Besides the British system of education gave a scientific world-view, and a new value system of freedom, humanism, modernism and so on.

Christian churches — a potential counter-hegemonical force

Christian Churches though failed even in orientating their own members to shed off scales of casteism, have helped the oppressed caste groups — the Sudras and the untouchables to acquire human dignity. Membership in the Church, enabled the down-trodden (caste-wise) to go to places of worship and take part in the liturgy, and even become priests and pastors — acquire sacred knowledge, perform sacraments for others and become religious heads (bishops) or heads of mutts. Education was made available to the low castes. A christian sudra or untouchable has comparatively greater chances to get rid of the 'tamas' qualities — ignorance, illiteracy; he is more prone to question his overlords, caste/class and even religious heads. In this way christianity was a disturbing element to the brahminical hegemony.

The hegemonical answer of the 'Intellectuals' to these two forces from outside — one, politico-cultural and the other, cultural and religious was — two-pronged: the social reform movement and the radical form of freedom struggle. The former aimed at mitigating Christian influence and impact on Hindu population and the latter to throw away the British rule as well to make India, ultimately a Hindu Rashtra. Tilak and Veer Savarkar were the torch-bearers of the second trend of response.

The Marxists — a potential counter-power in the 'political' society

Marxism aims at the establishment of a 'classless society' and a proletarian state by transforming working population into a 'class in-itself' and a 'class for-itself', leading them into a class struggle and revolution. Its programme of abolition of private property, of inheritance, nationalisation of industries and banks, universalisation of education and mass-media under the control of the state — all these go counter to the tradition of brahminical hegemony. Naturally, communism in India was considered by the Hindu fundamentalists as "an internal threat, a growing menace and a sworn enemy". Golwalker, the Guruji of the RSS recommends a Hindu national way of life based on the eternal truths discovered by the ancient seers and tested on the touch-stone of reason, experience and history¹¹.

The non-Brahmin movement

This movement which emerged and flourished in the early twenties in Maharashtra, and in Tamilnadu, under the leadership of Phule and Ambedkar in the former and Periar (E.V. Ramasamy Naicker) in the latter. In both states, the avowed policy of the non-Brahmin movement was to secure for the non-brahmins socio-economic justice and equality of status and opportunity.

Periyar, a veteran leader, founded the Dravidian movement whose objective was to battle against the term 'sudra'. By ceaseless propaganda, he attempted to make people critically aware of their shameful situation and of the out-moded and anti-social practices within the Hindu fold. The leaders of the Dravida Movement and parties functioned as 'organic intellectuals', organizing the down-trodden lower castes/classes. They had very effectively

11 M.S. Golwalker, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Jayarama Prakashana, Bangalore '80 p.55

utilized mass-media, particularly the press, public platform, the theatre and the cinema.

The Brahmin intellectuals, in retaliating made use of the same media: brahminical religious ideology and value system were re-inforced; temple worship, religious festival and pilgrimages were revived. The emergence of class-consciousness and Dravidian consciousness were thwarted and caste consciousness was subtly reinvigorated; Nationalism was propagated; the liberation of Bharat Mata was projected as the main goal to be achieved. Leaders like Gandhi were used for mass-mobilization towards the goals of Hindu revival and national resurgence.

The action groups and people's organization — secular and political

In the seventies, activists, as forces of change began to commit themselves to the building up of 'grassroots' people's organizations for social change. Knowingly or unknowingly they got their inspiration from three main sources: Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed'; the Marxian tool of social analysis and the theology of liberation. Soon hundreds of groups cropped up all over the country, to reach the marginalized and liberate them from 'magical consciousness'. Awareness-training and empowerment had been and still remains the main function of the Activists. Years of 'conscientization work' or non-formal education at 'grassroots' have now grown into several 'movements' of women, for 'human rights, for ecology, social health, and against consumerism' and so on. These groups face many a challenge — particularly from the long-established hegemonical power and its servant-maid, the mass-media. This hegemonical power today assumes a new form; the RSS, VHP, BJP (the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bharatiya Janata Party) combine.

The VHP-RSS-BJP combine — to restore brahminical hegemony

The RSS was founded by Dr. Hedgewar together with a few Chitbhavan Brahmins to make India a Hindu Rashtira — the land of Hindus. His successor gave it a detailed manifesto, and hatched out an equation: Indian = Hindu. "Hinduize politics and militarize Hinduism" was the motto. In the process of bringing back the hoary past of the Guptan Age, the reign of Shivaji, of Peshwar of the Maharatta country where Brahmins were at the

helm of affairs, Golwalkar said, the alien ideologies and systems of Islam, Christianity and Marxism are to be wiped out; regional and linguistic allegiance is to be watered down. 'One country, One Government, One Legislature, One Law and One Culture (*Bharatiya Vyavastha*) should be the goal'¹².

Today the Bharatiya Janata Party has become the political forum of the RSS. The VHP is one of the main off-shoots of the latter. Both BJP and VHP get almost all their members from the RSS fold and almost all the members, particularly the office-bearers, are Brahmins. It is these organizations — cultural and political — that now play a hegemonical role. The two events of national importance which they capitalized to mass mobilize the Hindu fold towards their hegemonical power are, the Mandir-Masjid issue and the Mandal controversy.

The Masjid-Mandir issue and mass media manipulation

The Mandir-Masjid controversy assumed great national importance in the month of October 1990 when L. K. Advani, symbolically started a Rathayatra from Somnath Temple, destroyed by Ghazni and restored by Patel.

What was the ultimate purpose of the yatra? Madhu Kishwar of 'Manushi'¹³ makes bold statements on Ayodhya episode:

"The real agenda of the BJP is to capture State Power for the purpose of implementing the policies of revenge. The Ram Mandir Movement is grounded not on the love of Ram or Ramayan but on the hatred of Muslims. The VHP... are obsessed with mobilizing Hindus as a political force to subordinate and terrorize non-Hindus in India. Their dharma is nationalism and not Hinduism. Their inspiration comes from Hitler, not from Ram... we must do to Muslim what Hitler did to Jews'... Their Rathayatra was conducted on the lines of an election campaign with Advani presented as the Prime ministerial candidate... Mr. Advani's nationalism is desperate to grab hold of state power in order to subordinate all those within his tyranny and to wreak vengeance on already vulnerable groups."

12. M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, op.cit., pp. 93-104

13. Madhu Kishwar, "In Defence of our Dharma", *Manushi*, No. 60 (1990) pp. 2,12

How did the Media interpret this event

Regarding print-media, it should be taken into account that there is a link between industry and newspapers. Industrialists are the big press-barons (Birlas own the Hindustan Times of India Group; The Times of India is of Bennet Colman and Co, which is the largest publishing House in India, owned by Ashok and Samir Jain, employing 5000 persons in its offices and presses and brings out 20 publications. The annual turn over of other industrial enterprises is Rs 74 crores)¹⁴. The press media personnel in India therefore dance to the ideological tune of their masters and their reports of the major events of the country such as the Mandir-Masjid and Mandal are often one-sided, politically biased. "...even major English dailies like *The Times of India* and the *Indian Express* among others, carry dubious version of events, create further tension in the already tense situation"¹⁵.

Iqbal Masud in his article 'Mandir-Masjid-Mandal, V. P. and Media' in the *Indian Express Magazine* (Nov, 25, 1990) mentions a few headlines of national papers on Oct. 31, 1991.

"Hundreds storm disputed shrine (*The Times of India*, Oct. 31).

"The saffron flag now flies atop the structure, Three saffron flags are now flying over the Babri-Masjid domes" (*TOI* Oct. 31, 1991)

"A major portion of Babri-Masjid was damaged...by Kar Sevaks braving bullets, tear gas and lathies. Most escaped after planting saffron flags atop the domes sending into raptures the thousands who laid siege to Janmasthan" (*Indian Express*)

Iqbal quotes Nawaz B. Modi's article, The press in India-Shahbano Judgement, in *Asian Survey* August '87: "The danger of the media is that they can on the one hand increase a minority group's feelings of alienation and on the other encourage the majority group's sense of self righteousness" as a telling conclusion to the coverage of Mandal and Mandir.

The electronic media also had its own share in adding fuel to the fire of communalism. With what political craftiness that the visual media could make a whole populace go frenzy and could

14. Paul Gueriviere, "The Information Industry: Political Economy of Media" *Social Action*, 41 (1991) 172

15. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communal Violence and the Role of Media*; Madyam (date not available.)

also make a government go tumbled down, was made evident by two video tapes prepared during the controversy. There is an Ayodhya video tape by Dr. J. K. Jain, a member of Parliament belonging to the Bharatiya Janatha Party. Sanjay Kumar in his article 'Mandir, Mandal and Video Wars' observes that "the tape had a well-defined role to play. It was tailor-made for use as a tool for political propaganda on behalf of the BJP-VHP-RSS combine. It sought to assert and prove through visual imagery what the politicians of the Hindutva lobby were proclaiming till then¹⁶.

This Video Tape portrayed,

- Advani, Vajpayee, Vijaya Raja Scindia in the ratha, surrounded by thousands of Karsevaks shouting slogans, with the bhajan of the participants
 - the leaders being arrested
 - the swelling crowd
 - the police lathi-charging and firing
 - a man in a pool of blood
 - police taking away a badly injured person
 - the Karsevaks hoisting the saffron flag on the mosque.
 - close-ups of dead bodies
 - the interviews of the wounded in the hospital and elsewhere.
- In the midst of this frenzy and fury a shot of a yawning Mulayam Singh Yadhav was taken, (yawning — surely due to over-strain and tension) but the message is clear: "Hinduism is in danger; Hindus have been too long passive, so tolerant; they have to rise up and assert themselves; V. P. Singh, (the then prime minister) is no good, rather anti-Hindu".

This tape together with another one on Mandal was born out of political electoral calculations which had forced the BJP to respond to Mandal and thereby undermining the issue of social justice via Mandal and projecting Mandir, as the fundamental issue¹⁷. *The Mandal Commission's Report* recommending reservations (at central government level also) for the Backward classes, was taken out of the Government archives and decided to be implemented by V.P. Singh. There was an instantaneous outburst of anger and protest from 'the twice-born, the high castes,

16. see Sanjay Kumar, "Mandir, Mandal and Video Wars: Communication and Social Tensions", *Social Action*, 41 (1991) 196-204

17. *Ibid*.

as well as Parsis and high caste Christians'. The Press echoed the 'twice born' voice that

- the Mandal would divide the Nation
- it ignores 'merit' and efficiency (supposed to be the prerogative of the upper castes, particularly brahmins) and adversely affects 'development' and marching into 21st century. Iqbal Masud says: "It is here that the worlds of the Yogi and the Uppie met – after all an up-dated caste system is the best guarantee of the New Economic Order"¹⁸.

The target of attack of anti-mandal mass media campaign was V. P. Singh, who was compared to Goebbels, to Nero and even to anti-Christ. *Times of India* said, 'He diminished India in the eyes of the world and, infinitely worse, he diminished it in our own eyes (Nov. 7, 1991). Iqbal says, 'when V.P. played the game of the mainstream, he was the darling of most of the media. But when he took a tough line on the 'untouchables', he became an 'untouchable'¹⁹.

Of the Newstrack's Mandal coverage Oct. 1990, brought out by Living Media India Ltd, publishers of *India Today*, was "dedicated to those young men and women who died in protest against the Mandal Commission Report". The aim: "to bring into your homes, the violence and pitched battles hoping you'll understand the anger and frustrations of students"... It entitled "Delhi-stburns while V. P. fiddles"... and captures vividly the explosive phase of the student agitation. Shot in the midst of thick action it gives the viewer a feel of the action, a feeling of being there. Sanjay Kumar's reflection on the role of mass media in this connection is noteworthy:

"Even if one were to disagree with the mannerism or even the contention of reservation per se, the central issue of ameliorating the woeful lot of the backward castes and classes which form a significant population of India meets with total silence all through the programme. The misery, exploitation and violence against the backwards in the contemporary India is a non-issue. To talk of social justice becomes undignified. The producer's personal bias becomes transparent."²⁰

¹⁸ Iqbal Masud, "Mandir, Masjid, Mandal, V.P. and the Media", *Indian Express* Nov, 25, 1990

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Sanjay Kumar, 'Mandir, Mandal and Video Wars...', *Op Cit* (16) p. 196-204

What is to be taken stock of, is how weighty is the producer's and correspondents' sensibility and sensitivity to socio-political events, and their manipulative capacity to mould public opinion via images and sounds.

Conclusion

The Mass media which not only communicate information but also have the power to contribute to economic development, nation-building and social harmony as well as to create critical consciousness among the masses, is now controlled and exploited by economic powers — national and international — and bureau-technocrats. In India it is manipulated for a double purpose: 1) to keep intact the inner core of the traditional ideology among the Indian masses and 2) to spread consumerism through allowing western-type ad-techniques. As for the first objective, the VHP is said to have invaded all channels of media available to it and "like a competent advertising agency, it has ceaselessly sought to impart its meanings through prior developments in the media market"²¹. It also seems to be fully aware that providing a cultural meaning to the masses and stabilizing it cannot be done without access to political power. Therefore the RSS and VHP have now initiated the Ram movement to achieve cultural and political hegemony.

As for the second objective, both the national and international Economic powers, try to spread new values of modernism and western way of life. What is most amazing is the way the 'Intellectuals' of India have worked out a happy amalgam, via 'media' of traditional values and the modern materialist, consumerist values. As the developed countries in the West, on their part exploit the media to propagate their cultural imperialism advertisement also helps to breed a culture of elitism and consumerism that developing countries battling poverty can ill-afford.

As far as the Church is concerned it is also hegemonical; its hegemonical power was at its height during the middle ages. Today, though this power has very much been mitigated, it can still play a role in the cultural sphere — of diffusing an ideology for the establishment of a just social order. The Church's documents, particularly the document of the Second Vatican Council and the various documents that followed contain inspiration for social

21. Pratip K. Dutta, "VHP's Ram at Ayodhya", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov. 2, 1991

change. However in practice, the transforming ideological role the church plays is rather marginal. In the cacophony of mass media the voices raised for social justice are drowned. So is the voice of the Church's 'Intellectuals' with Christian vision and commitment. Gail Omvedt says that at the face of the hegemonical power of the 'twice-born' exercised through mass media, the Sudras and the Dalits need a press structure of their own²². Not only the Sudras and the Dalits but the Church also should need an effective press and electronic media to champion the causes of the oppressed, to inspire the silent and marginalized social groups to get a medium to articulate and to act.

Madurai

Mary Pillai

22. Paul Guériviere, "Information Industry; Political Economy of Media", art. cit.

Mahatma Phule and the Reinterpretation of Culture

One of the most interesting areas of culture is the area of deviance. Unfortunately very little has been written on deviance structures even though they influence a very major part of our conduct and behaviour. When one is stigmatized a deviant, one's self image and view of society is structured accordingly, and this can have a debilitating effect on one's actions and behaviour. On the other hand, when one is freed from the shackles of deviance categories, one is liberated and able to act as a full human being.

It is important therefore to understand the process of movement from an ideology and culture in which one is labelled deviant, to an ideology and culture where one is freed from such labels. This paper cites the example of Jotirao Phule, a great social reformer of Maharashtra, who played an important part in influencing deviance structures, so as to make them truly liberating for the people of the lower castes of Maharashtra. The last part of the paper offers a few reflections for religion and moral theology.

I. What is deviance and how does one come to be considered deviant?

Deviance is defined as breaking of the social norm. However, since the social norm in *one* society may be different from the social norm in *another* society, deviance is specific or relative to particular societies.

From this it follows that, deviance is not a quality which is inherent in a person or in any particular kind of behaviour, rather it is a quality conferred on that behaviour by persons who respond to it."¹ Put simply, deviance is a label foisted by some groups

1. Becker Howard, *Outsiders*. New York, The Free Press of Glencoe, '63 p:9;
Erikson Kai, *Wayward Puritans*. New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1986 p. 6

in society on other groups, whose values and norms, differ from it. The label makers are the more powerful groups in society and the labelled deviants are the weaker, powerless groups in society². For example, the high caste and low caste groups have rival definitions of what is deviant. But since the high caste groups are more powerful, it is their definitions which prevail and hence the activities and occupations of low caste groups are considered deviant. Both homosexuality and begging are considered deviant, because those who make the laws against homosexuality and begging form a powerful lobby. Recently however, since gay people have started campaigns of their own, homosexuality is being considered less of a deviance. On the other hand, price fixing is not considered deviant or criminal because the powerful industrialists will never allow it to be labelled so.

Becoming deviant does not mean that one has to be bad or do a bad action, but merely that one belongs to a minority or powerless group. It is enough that one's values and norms conflict or clash with the values and norms of the powerful groups in societies. *Merely belonging to a minority sub culture is enough to be considered deviant, since the values of the dominant culture are the values which prevail in any society*³.

II. The role of Jotirao Phule

Jotirao Phule, born 1827 in Pune, came from the 'mali' or 'gardener' sub caste in Maharashtra, which formed part of the larger 'kunbi' or 'agricultural' cluster of castes in western India. Considered by Brahmins as belonging to the shudra varna, from very young he grew up with the notion that he was heavily stamped deviant because of being a Shudra. At the age of 11, he innocently joined a wedding procession of one of his Brahmin friends, and was rudely rejected from the procession. He was told to his face: "How dare you walk along with Brahmins? You Shudra, you have violated all caste rules and inflicted an insult on us. You are not our equal..." He went home well and truly shocked by this episode⁴.

2. Vold George, *Theoretical Criminology*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1979 p. 302
3. Quinney Richard, *The Social Reality of Crime*. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1970 p. 38-39 [*Italics are mine*].
4. Keer Dhananjay, *Mahatma Jotirao Phoolley*. Bombay, Popular Prakashan, Second Edition, 1974 p. 17

Worse still, his father had to withdraw him from the local school because the Brahmin teachers put pressure on his father, that children of the 'mali' caste should not aspire to the high culture of learning, which was reserved only for Brahmins⁵. By the time he matriculated from a mission school, Phule was resolved that he would try to change this way of thinking. He made it his lifelong ambition to free the Shudras and Ati Shudras from their deviant and low status, infuse them with an ideology and culture that would make them genuinely proud of themselves and at the same time would attack the Brahmins and prove that they were the real deviants.

He went about this in two ways:

Ideological approach: Sociologist of knowledge that he was, Phule realized that the chief reason by which the lower castes lacked self esteem and felt themselves to be worthless was that they had received a history, a cultural script and religious symbols that were not their own — these were given to them coloured by Brahmin spectacles. Hence, through his writings, *A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*, *Priestcraft Exposed*, *Slavery and Brahmin Teachers in the Education Department*, Phule tried to rewrite history, redefine the cultural script and reinterpret religious symbols from the viewpoint of the Shudras and Ati Shudras.

Action-oriented approach: Ideology was followed up with action and the founding of institutions and an organization that would translate the new cultural script into practice.

Ideological approach⁶

1. Phule's main strategy was to reject the Brahmin version of caste divisions, by projecting them as outsiders who disrupted the golden past of the Kshatriyas. In Phule's account of the origins of caste and of Indian society, the Kshatriyas were the original cultivators of the land, living in peace and prosperity. The Aryan Brahmins came from a region beyond the Indus, and after a long and protracted struggle overcame the Kshatriyas and subdued them. Traces of this ancient struggle were still to be seen in the religious writings of the Brahmins and in the terminology

5. Ibid. p. 11-12

6. For most of the information in this section I am indebted to the book of O'Hanlon Rosalind, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*. Bombay, Orient Longman, published in association with Cambridge University Press, London. 1985

used to describe the lower castes. The term Shudra was used to mean 'low and insignificant', those who were defeated, while the term Mahar probably derived from the phrase Maha-ri meaning, 'the great enemy'. The Mahars and Mangs of present day society were those whose ancestors had put up the fiercest resistance to the Brahmin invaders. As a result the Brahmins had singled them out for the special punishment of untouchability⁷.

Brahma and Parashuram were not gods, but had been real historical figures, leaders in the Aryan onslaught. Similarly, the Daityas (the Marathi word *dvaiti* means one who disagrees), chief of whom was Bali, were called demons, because they were the leaders of the defeated Kshatriyas⁸.

"In order to fulfil their plan that these Kshatriyas, Shudras, Mahars etc. should remain perpetually in slavery, and that they should be able to live comfortably on what the others earned by the sweat of their brow, *the Brahmins set up the fiction of caste divisions and made up several books on it for their own selfish ends*"⁹. Phule totally rejected the myth of the different castes arising from the different parts of the body as being a pure fabrication of Brahmins. Similarly, the prohibition, in the writings of Manu, of the education of Shudras arose out of the Brahmins' fear that the Shudras might remember their former greatness and then rebel against their authority.

2. Phule's next strategy was to give a collective identity to all agriculturalists, by *assimilating their shudra status to that of the Kshatriya status*. According to Phule, the Shudras and AtiShudras are the forgotten descendants of the heroic race of Kshatriyas, who were subjugated after they lost their battle with the Aryan Brahmins. Phule supported this interpretation by deriving the term Kshatriya from the Marathi word *kshetra*, a field. In his '*A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale*' Phule celebrated the exploits of the seventeenth century warrior. His real purpose was to recruit the figure of Shivaji for the construction of a collective identity for all lower castes. The ballad placed Shivaji within a startlingly new anti-Brahmin interpretation of Maharashtra's history and culture¹⁰.

7. Ibid. p. 142

8. Ibid. p. 146

9. Phule Jotirao, *Slavery* in D. Keer and S. G. Malshe (eds.), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Bombay, Maharashtra State Society for Literature and Culture, 1969 (Marathi) p. 91

10. O'Hanlon, Op. cit. p. 136

Shivaji was a Shudra, but he managed to get a Gagabhat from the UP to trace his lineage down to the Rajputs, thereby proving his Kshatriya status, and capable of being honoured Chatrapati. Using the ambiguities of Shivaji's own varna status, Phule's argument, by implication, pointed to the original Kshatriya identity of all Shudras, now concealed by the fictions of a Brahminic hierarchy. He drew a parallel between Shivaji and the mythical king Bali as the leaders of the lower castes against the external aggressors (brahmins)¹¹.

Through this argument Phule brought together several important symbols in the cultural tradition of Maharashtra: the land, the peasant cultivator, the warrior and the figure of Shivaji himself. He projected Maharashtra's warriors and cultivators as the real substance of her society. Since Shivaji was a Maratha, Phule's plan was to identify the term 'Marathas' with the whole kunbi-complex and associated castes, and thereby to exclude Brahmins.

3. Phule's third technique was the reinterpretation of popular cultural symbols by giving *new meaning to popular festivals*. Phule took contemporary customs and rituals and reinterpreted their origins placing them in an idyllic Pre-Aryan past, a Pre-Brahmin past, when Kshatriyas were living together in happy communities under the great King Bali.

Khandoba: Before the commencement of any auspicious work, no Maratha will fail to perform the rite of picking up the tali¹². Phule traced this custom of presenting a tali or dish of offerings to Khandoba (*tali ucalane*), to the ancient warrior ritual of the Kshatriyas of breaking camp (*tal ucalane*). In Khandoba, Phule chose one of the central figures of popular religious culture in Maharashtra the god who was the guardian deity of the Maratha and kunbi group of castes¹³.

Bali: The common Marathi saying, "May all sorrows and troubles disappear and the kingdom of Bali come" was interpreted by Phule as having its origins in the defeat of King Bali, the protector of the lower castes, by King Vaman, the upholder of the Brahmins. That is why on the tenth day of Ashwin, the day of

11. Ibid. p. 136

12. Phule Jotirao, *Slavery*. Op. cit. p. 107

13. O'Hanlon, Op. cit. p. 157

Dassera, the women prepare images of Bali and repeat the eschatological blessing: "May all evils disappear and Raja Bali's empire be restored". Manwaring, the collector of Marathi proverbs, says: The Shudras are fond of King Bali because he took their part against Vaman and the Brahmins¹⁴.

Most importantly, Phule took the *central festivals* of the all-India religious year — mainly in the months of Ashwina and Kartika — and organized around them the battle between Bali and Vaman, the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. Thus, the ceremony of shraddha, the Durga puja, Vijayadashami, the beliefs and practices of the Kojagiri purnima. Phule completed his account with a re-interpretation of the Diwali festival, celebration of goddess Laxmi and bhaubhij. These popular rites, he said, recalled the great rejoicing of the Kshatriyas at the defeat of Vaman. The women feasted their brothers in celebration and waved lamps around their heads and reminded them of Bali, who would come again and restore the golden past.

Phule therefore constructed with great ingenuity a complete rival interpretation of the conventional Hindu religious year.

4. Finally, the last strategy of Phule was to bring about in the popular mind *the association of Brahmins with corruption, bribery and money lending*.

Phule's collection of ballads, *Priestcraft Exposed*, attempted to destroy the belief in the necessity of a Brahmin to carry out religious ritual. No intermediary was necessary for access to divine power. Where Brahmins did attempt to interpose themselves, this was in search of only money and power¹⁶.

In one narrative, for instance, Phule describes how the Brahmin priest goes to the house of the Shudra at the birth of his child and terrifies the couple with tales of malevolent planetary influences, so that they ruin themselves by performing propitiatory rites and providing a feast for large numbers of Brahmins. Another narrative describes how the Brahmin priest plunders the Shudra at his wedding¹⁷.

14. Ibid. p. 158

15. Phule Jotirao, *Slavery*, Op. Cit. p. 108

16. O'Hanlon. Op. Cit. p. 208

17. Phule Jotirao, *Priestcraft Exposed* in Keer and Malshe (eds) *The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule*, Op. Cit. p. 50

Phule then demonstrated how Brahmin clerks, accountants, and administrators were able to manipulate illiterate debtors. He reveals the power of the Brahmin employees in local judicial and revenue institutions, and the corruption which resulted. The office of the *kulkarni*, nearly all of whom were Brahmins, provided immense opportunities for corruption and extortion. The *mamlatdar* and the *kulkarni*, between them, controlled all the bureaucratic processes¹⁸. Phule has thus equated the Brahmin with the money-lender and the corrupt administrator and identified him as the enemy of the lower castes.

In his short ballad, *Brahmin Teachers in the Education Department*, Phule shows how the Brahmin school teacher in a village used both his religious authority and his power as a school teacher to withhold education from the Shudras living there. The Brahmin teacher treated the low caste pupils quite differently from the children of his own caste fellows. Brahmin school inspectors sent in misleading reports of the educational aptitude of the children of the cultivators. Finally, Phule argued, Brahmins dominated the expression of public political opinion in the vernacular press. The editors of all the vernacular newspapers were Brahmins¹⁹.

Action-oriented approach

1. *Schools for girls and the low castes*: Phule followed up this ideological approach with an action-oriented approach, devoting himself to a variety of social reform campaigns. He founded several schools for low caste people, especially for the Malis, Mahars and Mangs. His idea was that through education the low castes would have a sense of power and take up important positions in the British administration, thereby giving up their low self-image status. Noting that women were treated as second rate citizens, Phule was also among the first to start schools for girls. He and his wife were the first teachers. He started his first girls' school when he was only twenty-one.

2. Secondly, he liberalized attitudes towards *widow remarriage*. The *Dnyanprakash* newspaper of 12 March 1860 reported the marriage of a widower and a widow of the Shenavi caste. Phule was supposed to have supported this bold venture²⁰. Phule

18. Phule Jotirao, *Slavery*. Op. cit. p. 78

19. O'Hanlon. Op. cit. p. 213 ff

20. Keer. Op. cit. p. 86

perceived that at the heart of prohibiting widows to remarry was a negative attitude towards women in the general culture. He even started a special 'Home for the prevention of female infanticide'. Here high caste widows who had become pregnant could come and give birth in secret and return quickly to their families, leaving the babies at the Home. 35 infants were born in this way. Phule and his wife supported these children. Further, Jotirao's father, Govindrao was grieved that Jotirao had no child, and the old man urged him to marry a second time. In reply, Jotirao asked: "If a couple had no child, would it not be unfair to charge a woman with barrenness? It might be the fault of the man as well. What if the woman went in for a second husband?" According to Phule, it was a cruel practice to marry a second time just because there was no issue from the first wife²¹.

3. Thirdly, Phule was one of the progenitors of the *Satya-Shodak Samaj*, an institution which strongly inveighed against the necessity of calling and paying Brahmin priests for marriages and other religious ceremonies. The Samaj actually conducted several ceremonies on its own without Brahmin priests. One of the controversial marriages was the marriage of a friend of Phule's, Krishnarao Sasane, whose marriage was not done by Brahmins, but by the members of the Satya Shodak Samaj, none of whom were Brahmins. "A Hindu marriage without a Brahmin priest!" The ceremony made headlines²². The Samaj, with more than 700 members, became a strong epicentre of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra.

In all these ways, by developing an ideology, by reinterpreting cultural categories and following these up with radical institutions, Jotirao Phule started a movement that liberated the lower castes from their deviant status — so much so that they could stand in Pune society with head held high — making it uneasy for those who called themselves Brahmins to continue to live in the bigoted manner they did.

III. Reflections for the Church and for Moral theology

The Church is a socializing agency and is in the business of making definitions of sin. We need to ask if this is a useful

21. Ibid. p. 87

22. Ibid. p. 133

exercise, not merely because defining sin, like defining deviance, is in some sense, exercising a form of control. Rather, we ought to ask whether, by labelling persons deviant or sinful, and prescribing forms of punishment for them, we are in any sense, stimulating them to improve their life or we are placing them further in their cage of lowliness.

In addition, most of our definitions of sin are in the realm of sexuality, influenced largely by our Judean heritage, and the long history of Catholic penitentials, drafted mainly by Catholic celibate monks of the early middle ages²³. What this has done is to give the Church a form of control in the interior and private area of morality. Two symbols of this privatizing of morality, that were reinforced by the pastoral injunction of 1215 that every christian make a confession to a priest at least once a year, are the examination of conscience and the confessional box²⁴. It was from this preoccupation and obsession with sexual sins, premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation etc. that problems of scrupulosity and guilt-complexes were found to be more prevalent among Catholics than in persons of other religions²⁵.

A more fundamental question that is occasioned by the analysis of Phule's work is whether the church's pastoral concern would be more effective if it moved into the whole area of deviance structures. At the present time, the church's concern with deviance is restricted to questions of orthodoxy, infallibility etc. Like Phule, were it to concentrate on structures of deviance that are harmful to the social fabric of society, would it not be opening up its horizons? For instance, in today's culture to take a bribe is not considered deviant. It is considered to be a part of normal business dealing. Can religion accept the challenge to develop an ideology and appropriate institutions to sway the culture in such a way that taking a bribe and being corrupt would henceforth be considered deviant.

23. Payer Pierre, *Sex and the Penitentials*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984 p. 52ff. Chadwick Nora, *The age of the saints in the early Celtic Church*, Oxford University Press. New York 1961. p. 149

24. Foucault Michel, *The History of Sexuality*. New York, Random House, Vintage Books, 1980 p. 60-61

25. Turner Bryan and Hepworth Mike, *Confession*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982. p. 48

Likewise most of the white collar crimes, including unfair trade agreements, are not considered deviant or criminal. On the contrary they are considered part of good business acumen, or the normal result of profit making. Could religion move out from its privatizing (sexual ?) concerns and influence cultural patterns so that white collar intrigues and unfair trade agreements are publicly 'shamed' and considered deviant?

The area of deviance is that nebulous zone that borders on and sometimes overlaps its adjacent areas of crime and sin. Just as people can be freed from deviance, deviance categories can be created also by the insistence on certain values, by a process of labelling and by procedures of 'shaming'. It is an area which is handled by socializing agencies like the church, school and voluntary organizations.

Mahatma Phule has blazed a trail. His pioneering work is an invitation to us to follow in his wake.

Bombay

John D'Mello

The Politics of Culture

Critical Reflections on Culture and Human Development from a Third World Perspective

The last few decades have witnessed a plethora of theories on poverty and development in the Third World. However, the Third World is not only a field of development, but also the realm of religions and cultural traditions. No theory concerning human development could, therefore, bypass this fact. One has to work out the nexus between the two. But the correlation between culture and human development is a complex one. The differences in approach to this relationship also mark the differences in ideological positions regarding the understanding of society and social change. More basically the question of culture and human progress is an issue that concerns the future shape of our world.

The present article is a small contribution in this direction. It is an invitation to go beyond conventional ways of relating human advancement and culture. Culture is a political question today with serious implications for the humanization of our world. In the light of the reflections made in the first three sections, the article will conclude with a few thoughts on the role of the Third World Churches. These reflections are made from a Third World perspective, with the experience in this country as the backdrop.

I

A convergence of opposites

The position of Max Weber on the relationship between the Protestant ethics and the emergence of capitalism is well-known. But the same author when he treats the religio-cultural world of India and other non-Western societies, sees in them

basically an obstacle for the human growth and development¹. Notwithstanding the substantial differences in their theoretical position in explaining culture and its relative role in social change, both Max Weber and Karl Marx seem to converge in maintaining that the cultures of non-Western peoples are obstructions for true growth. In fact, though he condemned the colonial exploitation of India by the British, Marx held that by the 'unconscious tool of history' the Indian society based on autonomous village structure was breaking up, paving way to the emergence of capitalism, the precondition for the appearance of the socialist society.

In more recent times, it is Gunnar Myrdal in his *Asian Drama* who presented a similar image of a stagnant Asian culture inhibiting the development process². The contrast was made between the Western societies which, through a culture engendered by Reformation, the Enlightenment and the scientific rational spirit could forge ahead, and the non-Western societies whose rigidity of cultures and social institutions, values and attitudes have not permitted anything similar to happen.

A wrong assumption

One assumption of such theories is that the socio-economic conditions of the Third World societies at the beginning stage of their development today is the same as that of the Western societies when they began their modern development. This is something far from the truth. Hardly does one recognize the political and social disruptive role played by colonialism, not to speak of its economic exploitation. This colossal fact of history should not be swept under the carpet to be then able to more easily lay the blame at the door of the cultures of these people for the lack of their development, or rather achievement in terms of what the West has laid down as the best for them — naturally that which

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1. Cfr. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston 1964. "For the various popular religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden, in which the practical way to orient oneself, or to find security in this world or the next, was to revere or coerce the spirits and seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous, or sacramental procedures. No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life". p. 270; cfr also G. R. Madan, *Western Sociologists on Indian Society*, Marx, Spencer, Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1979.
 2. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, NY 1968

the West has achieved for itself! I am reminded here of the words of Julius Nyerere. Speaking to a Western audience he said, "I am saying to you today that I am tired of being told that Tanzania's present condition arises out of our mistakes of policy, our own inefficiency and our own over-ambition. I am tired too of being told that Africa's present condition is the result of African incompetence, venality or general inferiority in capacity... For this reason, I refuse to apologize to Europe, America or to be put on the defensive in relation to the mistakes which Africa — or Tanzania — has made in its development effort... African poverty and underdevelopment is not unrelated to wealth and technical advances elsewhere. The existing pattern of wealth distribution in the world is the inherited cross of Africa, not the result of Africa's own actions"³.

Economic absolutism and cultural relativism

As a result of deeper anthropological studies and other factors, today there is a greater sensitivity to and recognition of the fact that each people have their own legitimate cultural world, traditions, belief, value-system, symbols etc. In a culturally relativistic trend of thought one would not consider them as negative factors, nor as positive forces. What is important is the realization of economic development — viewed basically as economic growth and increased gross national product (GNP). It is something analogous to the attitude of the British in India, who were not excessively concerned about the internal life of the Indian

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3. Julius K. Nyerere, "An Address" (delivered at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague), in *Development and Change*, vol 17, No. 3, July 1986, pp. 387–388. Cfr also Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London 1973. If development according to what the West chalked out for the Third World Societies did not take place, it is these societies which were blamed. But more recently with the ecological crisis aggravating with the excessive industrial effluents and gases (result of the philosophy of limitless growth and over-consumption), curiously it is again the Third World which is blamed for the situation! Concerned Indian citizens have registered a protest against such disinformation on the actual state of affairs in which the advanced industrial countries still take a lion's share in polluting the earth and its biosphere. cfr "A Case of Environmental Colonialism. Indian Citizens Challenge UN-US study on Third World's Role in Global Warming". in IFDA dossier 81, April/June 1991, pp. 79–80; cfr also Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, *Global Warming in an Unequal World. A Case of Environmental Colonialism*, Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi 1991.

society and its cultures as long as they did not constitute a hindrance to their economic interests which are non-negotiable absolutes. To that extent there is no harm in holding cultural relativism.

Clothing a naked paradigm

The pursuit of naked economic growth in the last few decades has increasingly led to the realization of the importance of non-economic factors in the process of development. As a result, a more pronounced trend has been to clothe the development paradigm by recognizing a certain role to culture. Even more, one has found in the cultures of the people a great potential for accelerating the economic growth. The World Bank, for example, has become conscious how economic policies have to take cognizance of the cultural roots, for example, of the peoples of Africa. The United Nations on its part is giving increasing importance to culture as a positive force, and underlines the importance of cultural pluralism and the development of human resources.

It is this new mood that has led to a search for elements in the cultural traditions that could enable economic growth among the various peoples. One has been asking, how, for example, Japan which does not share the Western history of Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment etc. has been able to make enviable economic advancement. There is no dearth for answers. It is attributed to the various aspects of Japanese traditional culture. Some decades ago, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict in her *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* tried to explain along these lines⁴. For M. Morishima the religio-cultural tradition of the Japanese grew in such a way as to always identify itself with the ruling class. This spirit of conformity facilitated the economic 'success' of Japan⁵. For others it is the Japanese corporate spirit of *furusato* — old village home — which is the matrix of their successful development⁶. Similarly in the face of what is acclaimed as the economic miracles of the four little dragons — Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea — one has been probing into the

4. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1946.

5. Michio Morishima, *Why Has Japan Succeeded? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982.

6. Cfr Masao Takenaka, *God Is Rice. Asian Culture and Christian Faith*, WCC, Geneva 1986, pp. 22-23.

cultural foundations of these societies. Their spirit of economic enterprise is attributed to the Confucian philosophy and ethic⁷.

In my view none of these approaches comes to grip with the cultural question in its relationship to human advancement. Across ideological barriers they all (even those that positively acknowledge the role of culture) share a common paradigm and framework of reference; it is the model according to which an underdeveloped or developing society goes through several successive stages to arrive at a pre-defined goal of development. This basic framework of an evolutionary linear process of human development is a kind of pre-determinism. Thus in the development scheme of Rostow, a society passes through five stages — traditional society, the pre-conditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity and the rate of high mass consumption⁸. It is this Rostowian economic philosophy, with its roots in Adam Smith, that has been dominating for the past decades the vision of the First World concerning the future of Third World Societies. The sub-title of Rostow's work — *A Non-Communist Manifesto* — published at the height of cold war revealed that there was more to it than the manifest compassionate concern for the development of Third World societies. Similarly in the Marxian vision one passes on from the stage of feudalism, capitalism and socialism to reach the ultimate goal of communism. If it was historically found in a society like India that there was no real feudalism, this cannot be true because there should have been such a stage before a society passed on to capitalist mode of production. Such deterministic view of human growth according to a certain infallible trajectory and clearly laid down prescriptions (regardless of the ideology one is wedded to) is most antithetical to a genuine recognition of the place of culture and cultural pluralism. Any conception, policy and practice ensouled by these or similar vision of human history cannot be expected to do justice to the cultures of the peoples. Rightly then either they deny the place of cultures as residuals of the past to be overcome, or when they

7. Cfr Martin Lu, *Confucianism. Its Relevance to Modern Society*, Federal Publications, Singapore 1983; cfr also *Social Values and Development: Asian Perspectives*, ed. by Durganand Sinha — Henry S. R. Kao, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1988.
8. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge University Press, London 1960.

are positively recognized, they are integrated into a superior scheme of global development philosophy and strategy centered on economy. In such basically Western paradigm of human development with its focus on economy, fresh recognition of culture is nothing but an instrument for economic goals, or a foil in which the development-package could be wrapped.

A dangerous integration

There are still many who entertain the view that the culture of the non-Western peoples are either a hindrance to development and of no consequence to the future of our world. This position, to my mind, does not present any danger; yes, it is so far removed from what evidence and experience suggest that it may provoke a smile. In my view what is most dangerous — because it is subtle and insidious — is the acknowledgement of culture as to make it only a cord with which to bind a people and integrate them with the dominant Western paradigm of development, modernization, its global system of economy, science, technology etc⁹. I am reminded of *Ashok-Leyland*, *Lehar-Pepsi*, *Ind-Suzuki* etc. Apparently modern capitalist economy has made efforts to make its own brand of inculturation!

Theories as distant from one another as the stages of growth of Rostow and the dependency theory which analyzes the world-situation in terms of dominance and dependence, centre and periphery, seem to share ultimately the same Western linear and evolutionary model of development as the prototype for all peoples and societies. Within it the concerns and focus may differ as for example when one concentrated on economic profits and another on equality, social justice and liberation. But then as long as we do not break out of the ruling paradigm of development, culture cannot make much headway. Therefore, I think, not only the present model of development, but also the present-day conventional ways of relating development and culture need to be subjected to serious scrutiny.

Without going into a detailed examination of such issues, let me straightaway state why I disagree with the existing models

9. This is a more recent version of the most basic and almost natural assumption of the universality of European culture. Even a person like Antonio Gramsci found a place for other cultures "only in so far as they have become constitutive elements in European culture" Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York 1973, p 416

of relating culture to development. One reason is obvious from what has been said above, namely the nexus between stages-like development paradigm and the instrumentalization of culture in this frame. The second, and more importantly, these models do not address culture as a *political* issue. And this is the most crucial question of culture today in the societies of the South. And that leads me to the next section of my reflections.

II

A misleading equation

In the South the whole question of the relationship between culture and development is inextricably bound up with the fact of many nations or ethnic identities being subsumed under one state or political unit. Similar to the assumption of parity of initial socio-political conditions between the First World and Third World societies in the conventional model of development (to which I referred above), there is a fallacy that equates the mode of Western political governance with that of non-Western societies, on the basis of wrong historical assumptions. The constitution of states in the West followed the break-up of empires. Thus there came to be *nation-states*. The path followed by India and most colonized societies of the South has been different. Here what came first were the states, with the nation-building as the goal to be achieved, by giving some unity and cohesion to the various cultural identities — linguistic, regional, caste, religious etc¹⁰. One nation, one state is not our situation. It is clear then that in countries like India we cannot and should not equate neither nation with the state nor the civil society with the polity. In Western Europe, because of historical reasons, nation and society are coterminous — a usage which is also adopted by the Western social sciences. But when we deal with societies like the ones in South Asia, under one political unit called a state we have different nations. And when we say nation we are stepping into a cultural realm

10. Cfr D. L. Sheth, "Nation-Building in Multi-Ethnic Societies. The Experience of South Asia" in Ramkant — B. C. Upreti (eds), *Nation-Building in South Asia*, vol. I, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi 1991, pp. 13–26; cfr also T. K. Oommen, *State and Society in India, Studies in Nation-Building*. Sage Publications, Delhi 1990; Zoya Hasan — S. N. Jha — Rasheeduddin Khan (eds), *The State, Political Process and Identity, Reflections on Modern India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1989, specially the contributions of Ashis Banerjee and S. K. Chaube.

which is different from the political unit signified by the term state. In these societies cultural identities are not mere cultural or social issues but are *political* questions, inasmuch as these various identities are brought under one political umbrella with the resulting situation of polarization and conflicts today.

A new name for War

"Development is the new name for peace"¹¹, so it was said not many years ago. Today, I think, development has become the new name for war. This has happened via the ethnic factor, the concrete form in which the cultural question is lived out in Third World societies.

In the first place, there are the blatant inequalities development has created, resulting in the split of societies along ethnic lines. The present development paradigm thrust into or willingly swallowed by the states of the South has become the principal reason for the exacerbation of ethnic identities, serious unrest, conflicts and terrorism. Instead of being ejected out as a piece of undigested and undigestible iron, it has been forcibly kept in the bowels of the social and cultural organism of these societies, resulting in their laceration. All this has contradicted the initial projections that in course of time, the ethnic factors and primordial loyalties will vanish into thin air through the heat of the development and modernization project, to give place to a post-ethnic world and society.

The unequal two-tiered economy generated by the ineluctable logic of the ruling development model, has led to the re-assertion of ethnic identities — religio-cultural, geographic, linguistic etc. (It takes on, not seldom, the form of militant religious fundamentalism, and even terrorism.) This happens in various ways. For some groups it is a desperate fight against all the negations they experience; a part of the battle for survival. For others it is to seize maximum pieces of the development cake. And still for others, it is to hold on tenaciously to the benefits and privileges economic prosperity, the reigning model of development, continues to deliver them. (It is interesting to note here how this latter assertion of ethnicity is taking place today in the West as evidenced by the emergence of rightist political and social trends on racial and ethnic basis —

11. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 1967.

most poignant ever since World War II. In the Western societies there is a threat-feeling of having to loose one day the present almost unlimited control over the world's resources on the one side, and the anxiety to safeguard the benefits of development from the danger of the modern Moors — those deprived of the benefits of development — storming at the doors, for example, of fortress Europe, in the form of increasing migration from the Third World societies.)

Caesura and homogenization

Further, the present process of development — an expression of the general project of modernization — has the inherent quality of creating a homogenization in terms of culture. It introduces a discontinuity, even more, a disruption in the cultural life of the people, splits the basis of their society and polity, dislocates them from their human environment and traditional roots in order to impose a monolithic cultural mould¹². Stereotyped patterns of production, and consumption under the tutelage of a global market become the respectable and unquestioned new universals. As alcoholism, pornography, drugs, breaking-up of families etc. — all tied to the aprons of development unfold themselves, ethnic forces are reactivated to respond to such a situation. One seeks to draw new moral forces and integral perspectives from one's traditional cultural roots. The cultural and ethnic reassertion becomes all the more vehement when coupled with the consciousness on the part of the victims of development of the loss of relative social and economic security enjoyed in the traditional societies, which now they find themselves suddenly deprived of. The old is not replaced by any humanizing new, as they find that their condition deteriorates with every passing day.

A crisis of legitimation

In this whole context the state in Third World societies is drawn into the picture. The state was expected to be the primary agent of the programme of development and modernization. Its existence was justified by the economic prosperity it was supposed to deliver through science, technology etc. Inspired by the modern development paradigm, the state controlled by the elites played

12. Cfr Rajni Kothari, *Rethinking Development.*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi 1990; cfr also G. B. Mathur, "The Current Impasse in Development Thinking The Metaphysics of Power", in *Alternatives XIV* (1989), pp. 463 – 479.

the role of integrating the pluri-cultural and multi-ethnic societies into one global model. In the process, it became the chief actor for creating gross disparities among the people. Further, the built-in tendency of the development for homogenization, called for an increasingly centralizing role on the part of the state. When the state was challenged in its pursuit of a Western model of development and its attendant centralization, it began to exercise a coercive and repressive role — all justified in the name of its drive for development, science, technology — in short, in its “catching up” with the West¹³. But then, as the ethnic conflicts began to surface and escalate, the state was forced to play a new role of mediating between various ethnic groups. From here it was a small step for the state itself to exploit the cultural and ethnic identities and even play one against the other in order to ensure its own survival. This has become a new political culture.

All this has led to a crisis of legitimation of the state in India and in many Third World countries¹⁴. Culture in relation to development is the new context of a fresh questioning of nation-state and its role. In a situation of inequalities which is in great part a making of the state itself, by its espousal of an economy-centered Western technocratic development model, (a point which has become so evident as not to need any elaboration here), the political unity it was supposed to offer to a multi-ethnic and pluri-national societies has become very questionable. “In the past”, as D. L. Sheth observes, “the ethnicities were embedded in a civilizational order. They were governed not in the paradigm of the state but the paradigm of social governance. They have now become politicized and have got detached from the wider civilizational base within which they grew and found meaning.

13. Cfr Ashis Nandy, “Science as a Reason of State” in ID., *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1988, pp. 1–23.

14. There seems to be a convergence — from different perspectives of course — of both modernist perspective and cultural-identity perspective in regard to the nation state. From the modernist perspective we are arriving at a kind of internationalization, globalization — a global economy, market, a kind of homogenous world-culture — which all in a way relativize the nation-state. From the perspective of cultural-identities, we have the situation of simply disregarding the nation-state as it has not really responded to the aspirations of the various groups subsumed under it, even more for being a legitimized agent of violence in the name of development.

In the process of state-induced change, they have ceased to be culturally stable and politically viable entities"¹⁵.

Lack of value-consensus

Thus we are driven today to a situation in which state and its modernizing and development pursuit, instead of creating unity and cohesion among the various cultural and ethnic groups have caused fragmentation. The state has discredited itself as a point of crystallization of various cultural and ethnic identities into a nation. The ideology and philosophy of secularism which has accompanied the modernization drive of the state lacks concrete content to offer a basis of unity in pluri-religious and multi-ethnic societies. Such a society requires a kind of basic value consensus to build up unity, which is claimed to be provided by secularism, but, which in fact is not. All this explains the growing need to find a new basis for the self-definition of India — and this applies also to other South Asian countries and Third World societies at large.

The effort to find a new basis has gone in the direction of a search for the cultural roots of the majority — as done by militant Hindu fundamentalists. The re-discovery of the *hindutva* has been presented as a common basis for political unity, with the exclusion of Muslims and Christians considered to belong to an alien culture. One reads history with this perspective and searches for pre-Islamic and pre-Christian roots of Hindu unity. There are other efforts to find a basis of unity such as the spirit of the struggle for Independence from the colonial powers. According to T. K. Oommen, whether it is a traditionalist, nationalist or modernist search for a new basis of integration and unity, all of them suffer from an inherent hierarchical conception of culture and tend to be one or other form of hegemony¹⁶.

A convincing and consistent basis or political framework which will harmoniously integrate the cultural and ethnic plurality and yet at the same time cast off inequalities is yet to come by. The search is on, and it is certainly not an easy task. But one thing has become clear that the principle of integration of a complex society like India cannot be imported from without — be it modernization, development, secularism, science, technology etc.

15. D. L. Sheth, "Nation-Building in Multi-Ethnic Societies. The Experience of South Asia", *art. cit.* p. 18

16. Cfr, T. K. Oommen, *op. cit.*

III

A mutation of civilizational magnitude

Our above reflections show how the present paradigm of development is humanly and culturally not sustainable. The solution to this question does not lie in a simple correction of this model either; for, structurally it is such that by its narrow economism it is destructive of the human as well as the cultural. Nor does the answer lie in some kind of alternative development which will take its place. For such an alternative development could become again another *universal* in the place of the present one, which would go against cultural pluralism and its implications.

We need to move rather in the direction of a much more fundamental and radically new vision of human condition and the future destiny of humanity in which cultural pluralism and humanly rich traditions of people will have a much greater role than being either a simple instrument for economic purposes, or a rallying point to fight out and get the best of the fruits of development in battle with other cultural identities.

The central question then is *humanization*, which cannot be equated with the ideology of development and modernization. Humanization offers a much broader perspective and opens up wider vistas and fresh horizons. Defining the human is not and cannot be the monopoly of one civilization or one people. The present malady that has struck the world is the seizure of this role by one civilization — the Western. But we have seen the disastrous results of it too. What is required today is not a change which can be defined within the narrow parameters of development (imagined to be moving in linear progression), but a transformation of civilizational proportions and magnitude. Millennial civilizational societies like India and China, and other Third World societies with their cultures, experiences and traditions need to be active agents and significant actors in a salutary dialogue to save the world and humanity from the brink of disaster to which one particular paradigm of human development (and its universalization) emanating from one part of the world has brought the entire humanity. It is with this perspective that I want to approach some of the underlying issues relating to culture and human development.

In the first place, the cognitive tools and concepts we employ to interpret a particular phenomenon or situation is crucial. What basically gives room to the particular type of discourse about development and its practice is the 'epistemological dualism' built into the modern project. The various theories of modernization and development practice based on it share the same dualism. The ruling episteme is in fact a dichotomous one, and it polarizes and interprets reality in terms of modernity in opposition to tradition, development in opposition to underdevelopment, the scientific and technological in opposition to 'primitive' etc. This distorted perception and interpretation of reality is at the root of the type of relationship now we have between the First World and the Third World. Once the present situation is interpreted in 'dichotomous terms, the way is clear for the West to carry through its programmes of development, modernization and what not.

Encounters in a continuum

In this perspective, one fails to see the existence of a basic *continuity* in the Third World societies. The dualist episteme makes a caesura, a lethal cut of discontinuity from what these peoples and societies have lived for centuries and millennia. Instead of starting with the dichotomous tradition-modernity contrast (within the range of which falls the discourse about development), we should look at the life of a people as a continuum which is marked by many encounters. If, for example, India encounters today the modern world with its science, technology, development, political, economic, educational systems etc., such an encounter is not totally new — not as for content but as for the structure and dynamics is concerned. It has met the 'new' from within its own tradition as for example the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, and from without, as for example the arrival of Islam and Christianity (which were all not simple religious issues but social and political as well). As for the societies of the respective periods were concerned, such meetings were very momentous, riddled with many problems. The Indian society for example has found ways of appropriating and integrating the new as part of its continuous flow of tradition. These experiences and traditions which are part of a people's life and history cannot be cast aside when they encounter today new experiences, institutions, ways of controlling nature as offered by present-day science and technology.

Pluralism in rationality

The conception of rationality undergirding development, science, technology and modernization is a rationality that is the legacy of the modern Western world, as fashioned specially by the Enlightenment. Even though it claims to be universal, in reality, it is a narrow and limited rationality at the service of the dominance of the Western world over peoples and nations. Such a political purpose of a particular brand of rationality, understandably, requires that it be projected as *the* referent for validating non-Western peoples and their development; it is the yardstick for measuring all human endeavours and quests. Anything falling outside its range and reach is bound to be irrational.

The chief field of operation of this modern rationality is the mediation between nature and the human, which takes on the form of science and technology. Suresh Sharma rightly observes in this regard: "The structures of mediations — techniques, instruments, concepts — between humanity and nature embody, as it were, the objectified measure of the extent to which humanity has realized its innate quest towards freedom. Technology as reified reason signifies the emergence of humanity into a world growing ever more plentiful and unified. Hence a framework of validation that could be characterized as the 'instrumental mode of validation'. Its final referent flows from the assumption that the demonstrable effectiveness and mediating instrumentalities between humanity and Nature furnishes the only possible objective criterion for validation"¹⁷.

Rationality is not something exclusive to the modern Western tradition. It would be ridiculous to claim that the European world of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with its Enlightenment has found solutions to all human problems in perpetuity! Critical rationality is part and parcel of the very structure of human thinking, and in encounter with experience — which is always contextual — it takes on different forms and expresses itself in various ways. Such a rationality is deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of people, their history. The critical rationality we find in Gandhi, for example, in his dealings with the imperialist power, and in Ambedkar in his stance against the oppression of the *dalits* is

17. Suresh Sharma, "Cultural Survival in the Age of Progress" in *Alternatives* XIII (1988) pp. 488-513 (p. 486).

a rationality sharpened on the anvil of experience. Critical rationality is not simply the result of education. It is the fruit of sensitive and perceptive reading of the history and involvement in it. Without critical rationality people could not have survived as human beings and as societies. The process of genuine humanization would require the unfolding of the pluriform rationality as an important ingredient. For true humanization every people should begin from the rationality embedded in their own traditions — which is also a process of coming to their own. Only in this way will they be able to encounter the new expressive of another rationality. They will be in a position to critically appropriate the modern. This is different from a critical appropriation of tradition, which would place the starting point and point of reference outside their world of experience, which cannot ensure continuity. When the people have *come to their own* they will also make suitable choices concerning the extent and forms of controlling nature (science and technology) that correspond to their way of life and their growth as a people¹⁸. And that leads me to the next point.

Diversity in technology

Science and technology are seen as the pillars of the modern development ideology. Hence the loud talk about transfer of science and technology to the Third World as a part of the programme of developing these societies. Today both science and technology are the *ancillae* — the handmaids of the market, at its beck and call, ever ready to prostitute themselves. But that is not the point I want to deal here.

What I am concerned here is the assumption that science and technology belong to the Western world. The Western people are characterized as scientific and technological and non-Western people primitive. This is another instance of the polar contrasts, part of the development paradigm. But the *coup de grace* to such ways of thinking has been administered among others, by the studies of Joseph Needham about technology and science in the

18. In fact this is what history attests. In his well-researched historical work Ahan Jain Quaisir states: "Indeed, our inquiry does not uncover built-in resistance to non-traditional products of technology, but as long as there was an 'alternative' or 'appropriate' indigenous technology which could serve the needs of Indians to a reasonable degree, the European counterpart was understandably passed over". *Indian Response to European Technology and Culture (A. D. 1498-1707)*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1982, p.139.

Chinese society and by Dharampal and Claude Alvares as far as India is concerned¹⁹. To cite just an example the three inventions which were considered so basic by Bacon to the development of the world — printing (in the area of culture), gunpowder (in the political and military sphere), and magnet (in navigation, and hence commerce) — were Chinese in origin²⁰. There is no need to elaborate on the role played by the scientific achievements of Medieval Arab world which not only contributed significantly to the advancement of science, but also in a way mediated the scientific and technological heritage of other civilizations like China and India.

The studies of these authors — as well-brought out specially in the work of Alvares, an Indian historian of technology — lead to two important conclusions: First, the modern technological world is not simply the brainchild of the genial Western man, though it is made to appear so. Many discoveries and fundamental principles of other peoples have been appropriated by the West along with colonial appropriation of the wealth of the nations. The heritage of science and technology as we have them today is in fact the fruit of the encounter of great civilizations each one of which had its contributions to make. Second, each people found its suitable means and tools which dovetailed with their social and environmental conditions and the fulfilment of their material needs. If culture can be viewed, *inter alia*, as what a people collectively create in response to their environment in their process of humanization, then, technology itself can be viewed as a cultural element. As such *pluralism* in technology is something legitimate, and even necessary.

Plural knowledge-systems

Seen from the perspective of humanization and the need of encounter of civilizations today to grapple with the human question (in resolving which we are becoming increasingly incapable in spite of the inflation of knowledge), the knowledge-systems of the peoples assume great importance. They are the

19. Joseph Needham et al., *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge 1954, vols 1-7; Claude Alvares, *Homo Faber. Technology and Culture in India, China and the West 1500 to the Present Day*, Allied Publishers, Bombay 1979; Dharampal, *Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present*, Pune (no date).

20. Cfr Claude Alvares *op. cit.* p. 35

repertoire in which we could find a wide variety of approach to rationality, as well as to science and technology. The destruction of indigenous knowledge-systems — started in colonial days — is reaching almost its completion under the steamrolling effect of Western knowledge-industry consonant with its paradigm of development. As there is need for pluralism in technology, so also for humanization, we need to accept the plurality of knowledge-systems. Some systems of knowledge may have unsuspected clues to solve particular human problems we are facing today.

The question of unity

The affirmation of an effective cultural pluralism — be it in science, technology, economy, knowledge systems etc. — as the direction for true humanization may legitimately raise the question of the unity of one world. There cannot be a second opinion about the need of progressive growth of humanity into unity. But it is a delusion if anyone were to believe that the present globalization in economy, international division of labour, international market, commercial consortia, the spread of a consumerist sub-cultural way of life etc. constitute such a unity. Unity yes, but not a homogenization imposed by the Western paradigm of human development as the unity of the world. Rather, as I noted earlier it is this paradigm of development which is the root cause of divisions. Unity and integration of the human family can only be a fruit of continuous dialogue and encounter between cultures, between civilizations.

Hopeful signs

When we are before the prospect of a transformation of civilizational proportions, it is difficult to lay down the shape of the things to come in the form of a project. However the direction of this change can be observed through some signs. One such sign is the growing contemporary social movements in India and in many parts of the world. The significance of these movements is that they have roots in the social and political environments where they appear as responses to concrete human situations. They draw more and more from the abundant knowledge systems of the people, and are sensitive to their approach to the world and nature. In this way a certain pluralism in the pursuit of humanization comes to the fore. From the diversity of situations to which these social movements seek to respond, fresh theoretical perspectives emerge. Theorizing, thus ceases to be an elitist

activity pursuing its pre-determined goals in isolation from the empirical reality.

Methodologically such movements offer the much desired pluralism for the process of humanization whereas any theorizing tends to project homogeneous and universalist models. Furthermore, such movements at the grassroots involved as they are in a process of democratization not only of the political realm, but of every aspect of life, are able to offer an initial model of future political praxis that is necessary for the realization of a genuine process of humanization. But the most significant aspect of these movements is the challenge they pose, both at the macro and micro levels, to the ruling paradigm of human development — a task which no amount of counter-theories can do so ably.

IV

The two crutches

In the light of the foregoing considerations, let me offer in this last section, a few thoughts on the Indian Church and the Churches in the Third World at large. Two major concerns of the Indian Church are development and inculturation. They define respectively the Church *ad extra* — in its relation to society — and the Church *ad intra* — the re-designing of its self-image. To my mind, both these are but the two crutches by which a Church seriously wounded by its image of being a residual of the colonial times, is attempting to make its way. Christianity may not be able to offer its contribution to the emergence of a fresh and creative perspective on humanization in India as long as it is wedded to these conceptual worlds. For both of them, as we shall presently see limit the praxis of the Church — both within and outside.

A decultured anthropology

The development practice which is the hall-mark of the Indian Church by now, is basically an adoption of the Western techno-economic paradigm. The Church has become — unwittingly, of course — one of the main agents for the consolidation of the project of human development as designed and moulded in the West, and thereby for the world-model implied in it. As such, understandably, culture has not played any significant role in the development practice of the Church, because for such a model culture is mostly an external and tangential factor (mostly to accelerate economic development) and not constitutive of it.

In this context, I want to refer to two expressions used in Church-circles — 'integral development' (mostly in Catholic circles) and 'sustainable development' (mostly in Protestant circles). Both these are meant to qualify the development, reminding that development is not merely economical and that there are other aspects to it. I tend to consider both these expressions somewhat insidious. For, by introducing such well-meant qualifications, they could render the dominant Western model of development something permanent, and as the ultimate point of reference, albeit with some modifications and with a caveat or two.

If the cultural question is not built into the practice of development by the Church, this is so not only because of its adoption of the Western model, but more deeply because of the inheritance with it of a *decultured anthropology*. The Man who dominates nature and controls its resources in this anthropology (which invokes the Biblical tradition to its support) is a Man in the abstract, disjointed from the world of culture. Such a Man is nothing but a mental fiction. The particular type of relationship to nature as expressed through a culture is itself part of the self-definition of the human being, who is necessarily part of a culture, a people. As in other areas, a Western decultured anthropology has been universalized to form the substratum of the development model now widely adopted and practised by the Church.

An apolitical culture

On the other side, when the Church does focus its attention on culture, it turns out to be, like the decultured anthropology of development practice, an *apolitical culture*. The fact that the project of inculturation has been understood chiefly as a matter of the self-image of the Church is itself an indication of the apolitical way culture is dealt with by the Church. But that is not the point of our direct concern here. What I want to underscore here is the fact that the question of cultural and ethnic identities and all the the social and political conflicts connected with it (which is so much a part of the life of the society) does not come under the purview of neither development nor inculturation as practised by the Church. The contribution Christianity can effect in our country and other nations of the Third World for a true civilizational transformation will depend on how well and how soon the Church extricates itself from these received theoretical moulds of development and inculturation.

An appropriate theology

We lack an appropriate theology of the relationship of the Church to the world. This is, I think, one of the reasons why the Church has not been able to move in the direction of a civilizational change. The Indian Church and other Churches of the South adopted a theology of the world as given by Vatican II which is reflective of the problematique as lived and experienced by the Western world. The dominating perspective in this theology is the *autonomy of temporal realities*, which is understandable in the light of the long struggles in the West between the Church and the secular forces. But in societies like India the relationship of the Church to the world has to be thought out in new terms taking into cognizance the past history as well as the present political character of cultural and ethnic identities.

A theology of the Church to the world in societies like India cannot be constructed solely by the Church without effective and politically significant dialogue with other world-views, images of man and projects about humanization as contained in non-Western cultures, peoples and civilizations²¹. Particularly, given the hope the various social movements in Third World societies represent, it is of paramount importance for the Church to join with them in generating new cultural forces for genuine humanizing transformation at the micro and macro levels.

For the Church, being immersed into the practice of development works may hinder necessary initiatives in this direction. Even more dangerous would be if the Church entertains the thought that it alone has the key for humanization. If we take seriously that "Man is the way for the Church"²² we have to necessarily enter into the different images of man as offered by the various cultures. It is the culturally and contextually situated man who is the way for the Church. If this consequence is not taken earnestly, it is a little step from "Man is the way for the Church" to the Church is the sole way for man. I wonder whether such a dangerous shift is not already taking place. The undertones of recent documents such as *Redemptoris Missio* and *Centessimus Annus* would seem to reflect this direction. The

21. Cfr Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East. Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement*, Chair In Christianity, University of Madras 1990.

22. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979.

circle seems to be complete now. Earlier Christian position spoke of no salvation outside the Church. Subsequently a place was created within Western theology for other religions, cultures etc. In the meantime salvation has been understood more and more in terms of humanization. And now we have come full circle round to imply that the Church is the sole genuine agency for humanization. And therefore it remains the ultimate point of reference. If the project of the future of human family is a joint venture of many cultures, traditions and civilizations — as it should be — then such theological trends in combination with claims about the absoluteness of the Western paradigm of development would constitute a serious obstacle.

Conclusion

It is high time then we bade goodbye and sang requiem without tears to the phase of development ideology with all its assumptions and premises. This monolithic ideology about human progress, brewed in the West and ardently supported by its local patrons, is, in my view, the most serious block as it provides a subterfuge and alibi for facing the humanization of our world as common venture²³.

Culture with its political implications is the crucial issue today in the project of humanization. There is a way of relating development to culture which exploits the latter for greater economic achievement and profitability. But the present cultural and ethnic conflicts and turmoils — resulting from unsustainability of the present pattern of development — are a challenge to rethink thoroughly in civilizational terms the future shape of humanity. They are not simply crisis situations to be managed. They call for innovative and humanizing frameworks of political governance,

23. I am aware that in the West itself in some circles a serious critique is voiced concerning the present pattern of development. There is grass roots activism which takes up several concrete issues. I am not referring to the post-modernists and post-structuralists, who take to romanticism, and consider that since the Western model is not good for them, it is not good for the Third World either. It is rather the politically and culturally conscious social movements in the West which come into the picture. If they draw from their own Western neglected cultural traditions the resources for effectively challenging the present model of human progress, they will find that their concerns and the concerns expressed by the emerging social movements in the Third World meet, and that they can collaborate in a common venture towards humanizing our world.

economic arrangements, and fresh systems of values and meanings, all of which go beyond the resources of any one single people. The irruption of the cultural and the ethnic beckons us, therefore, towards a long-term project of humanization in which all the peoples of the earth with all their resources will actively participate in shaping a common future. It calls for a political approach to culture both at the micro level as well as in the global task of shaping the future of the world.

With the bankruptcy of the ruling paradigm of development, exposed ever more clearly, we begin to realize particularly the paramount importance of cultures of people and their resources of knowledge for true humanization. As bearers of centuries and millennial experience of dealing with nature and human society, the various cultures with their repertoire of knowledge and fund of wisdom can offer unsuspected lead to make our way out of the labyrinth with which we have encircled ourselves. The emerging social movements from indigenous roots offer a lot of hope. All this ought to become the necessary backdrop to the Third World Churches for a critical self-examination of their developmental practice and inculturation, and for the creation of a fresh theology so as to be able to contribute more creatively towards the project of humanization.

Tiruchirapalli

Felix Wilfred

The Role of the Theologian in the Church in India Today

Statement of the Indian Theological Association Fifteenth Annual Meeting, December 28-31, 1991

Jeevan Jyothi, Hyderabad

Preamble

1. Called to theologize in our very ancient and enduring religio-cultural milieu, where the experience of God served as the basis for the quest of wisdom and truth, and summoned to discern the voice of God in the cries of our people of whom the great majority live below or just above the poverty line, we, the members of the Indian Theological Association, gathered at Jeevan Jyothi, Hyderabad, from December 28-31, 1991, reflected on the role of the theologian in the Church in India today. As disciples of Jesus, theologians are called to seek the same wisdom and truth in the light of their faith-experience in the community. As prophets, they are challenged to articulate the truth unveiling itself in the struggles of the people.

2. The theologian does not seek the Truth in isolation but in the context of the believing community in dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies. Fulfilling the mission of the community, he/she discovers the truth through committed action and intellectual reflection. Drawing strength and inspiration from the community, and deeply involved in its life-processes, the Indian theologian tries to articulate the experiences and aspirations of his/her people with a spirit that is genuinely Christian and a context that is specifically Indian.

The context

3. In this process, the theologian becomes painfully aware that theology as it exists today in India is inadequate to meet

the many and complex challenges of the Indian situation. The very concept of theology itself needs to be redefined as critical reflection on experience in the context of faith. This experience implies for us in India, participation in the liberative struggles of the people, especially the deprived and marginalized, as also entering into their religious ethos. Faith, our human response to God's revelation, demands a commitment to His plan for humankind.

4. For the first time in history, Christianity is encountering directly the World Religions in dialogue. At this unique moment, the Church is called to make a new creative synthesis of its faith-experience. Our situation today is very similar to that of the Church's encounter with the Greek philosophical world which took place in the early Christian centuries. India is the privileged and fertile land of this inter-religious encounter and creative synthesis. Even the cry of the poor and their liberative struggle cannot be properly understood and adequately responded to, if divorced from their inter-religious context. Indian theologians have a unique role to play and a specific contribution to make to universal Christian theology.

The method

5. This understanding of theology calls for an appropriate method; experience and reflection are constitutive elements. Involvement in the very life-struggles of the poor and the oppressed, and the reflection on this experience necessarily result in a theology that is born of the people and articulated by them, assisted by the theologian. This theology finds expression not only in conceptual and systematic formulations, but also in poems, stories, narratives, symbols, myths etc. This strongly recommends the use of the vernacular. Only then shall we be able to enter into the very heart and soul of our people and their culture.

6. Theologizing is an experience-action-reflection process. Experience of the actual life-situation, people's intuitive perception of the reality as it is and should be, their spontaneous responses to their condition and their discernment of the Divine in their struggles, are central features of a People's Theology. Such a theology sustains, supports and strengthens the people in their struggles. It reflects the people's awakening and questions the maintenance of the *status quo*: The demands of an eco-theology

that promotes the reorganization of the distribution of the resources of the earth would be an instance of this. It also fosters a new understanding of religion and the depth-dimension of human experience.

7. People deeply involved in such a theologizing process will make the reality of the People's Church more visible and fully alive. On the other hand, such theologizing can take place and be sustained only within a deeply committed community.

The image of the theologian

8. This new approach to theologizing requires new type of theologians. In a creative and prophetic manner they will have to animate, guide and articulate the faith-experience of the community to the ever new life-situations of the people. They will emerge as the result of an incarnational involvement in the Indian context. They will be the product of the Word of God that has transformed them through a faith-experience as well as the context in which they are called to respond to this Word by virtue of their mission. They have a Christian identity which they are called to express through an Indian image which will enable them to fulfil the mission Jesus Christ has entrusted to them.

9. In India we have various types of persons whose role approximates to that of the theologian. For example, in the Hindu tradition: *Bhashyakara* is the commentator or exegete of the sacred scriptures, *acharya* is the learned teacher, scholar, the spiritual guide who initiates his students into the scriptures. A *guru* is the spiritual parent to whom the disciple owes implicit obedience, who initiates him/her to *jnana* and through whom he/she finds *moksha*. *Swami* is a learned person who commands authority over groups or even sects. Finally, we have the *Pandita*, a learned person, a wise scholar who has expertise not only in religious matters, but also in literary and philosophical subjects.

10. In interpreting the faith to the community, Indian theologians may draw inspiration from these models, maintaining at the same time their Christian specificity. They must, therefore, fulfil the following requirements:

11. They must be deeply involved in the faith-life of the community. This implies that they have to enter into the struggles

and aspirations of the people to respond to God, but at the same time be sufficiently free to look contemplatively and critically at reality. Their openness to the context should go hand in hand with a prophetic freedom to discern God's plan of action in the world as comprehensively as humanly possible, carefully avoiding fanaticism and fundamentalism in dealing with ideologies.

12. They have to maintain a two-fold loyalty. As Christians, they have to be faithful to their own faith-convictions; as members of the wider human community, they have to remain open to perspectives that go beyond the limits placed by their religious group. They cannot do this by adopting a merely intellectual approach. An integrated vision of reality within which they situate their faith-convictions will enable them to discover the Mystery that unifies all plurality.

13. Indian theologians must learn to theologize in silence if they have to enter into this vision. They have to learn to listen because they are primarily seekers and not problem-solvers. By being actively passive, the Mystery they seek to discover will take possession of them rather than they themselves taking possession of the Mystery.

14. A crucial element in this experience of the Indian theologian is the cry of the people. The source of this cry is to be found in the very way in which our society is structured. The theologian should enter into this sinful situation, share the pains of the people and experience within him/her/self the yearning for liberation.

15. This demands that the life of the theologian be rooted in the experience of prayer and contemplation of the Divine, active both in people's lives and nature, which nourishes their discernment and provides vision and insight; and be sustained by an incarnate spirituality.

16. The theologian committed to people, especially to solidarity with the powerless, adopts a life-style of simplicity in consonance with the lot of the poor and witnesses to the values of the Kingdom, carefully avoiding bourgeois and consumerist pretensions.

The function of the theologian

17. The function of the theologian, essential for the life of

the Church, must be understood within the context of the community of faith and its mission. Theologians help the community reflect on, understand and articulate its faith-experience. Therefore, they should not be seen merely either as spokes-persons for the Magisterium or as academicians who indulge in theological reflection or as seminary professors concerned with the formation of priests, or as those who merely translate the official teaching into a more suitable language.

18. Theology is a prerogative not only of the clergy or religious but also of the lay people who must be encouraged, supported and assisted. Their role in theologizing should be recognized by the Church.

19. To help the community articulate its experience of faith would mean creatively and critically interpreting the faith of the community so that it is both faithful to the Christian tradition and open to the signs of the times. To be able to do this, it is essential that the theologian be rooted in the local community. The joys and hopes, sorrows and struggles of the people are to become his/her own. Theologians should also adopt an attitude to the Christian tradition, which is both loyal and critical at the same time. They should be persons who reflect and are able to discern the movement of the Spirit in and through the signs of the times.

20. To achieve this, it is necessary that there be dialogue with contemporary culture at all levels: local, national and international, in all its dimensions. Theologians theologize from their local context, but they must be open to the wider Christian context as well. Their theology must be particular but it should transcend its own particularity by being open to the experience of other Christian communities. In this way every particular Church can contribute to the theological reflection of the whole Church.

21. In the carrying out of their mission, theologians have rights which must be both recognized and respected by the community, especially by the Magisterium. The most important among these rights are: freedom to do theological research and reflection in the Church, exercising the charism of theologizing which is a gift of the Spirit to the Church; freedom to make deeper discoveries of the faith-experience; the promotion of a healthy and creative

pluralism; the right to be heard when dealing with controversial issues; fair procedures to evaluate the opinions and conclusions of theologians.

22. Theologians have certain responsibilities too. They are bound by the Word of God. In interpreting that Word, they should be moved not only by scientific considerations, but especially by a spirit of faith and contemplative silence. They should be attuned to the "*sensus fidei*", the community experience of the faith in Jesus Christ. They should also recognize the ministry of the Magisterium to ensure the rootedness of the present-day interpretation of the faith in the living tradition of the Church.

The theologian and the Christian community

23. The whole believing community, the Church, presided over by the Bishop, is the theologizing subject. In order to fulfil this task so vital for its life and the mission of Jesus bequeathed to it, theologians have to play a distinctive role. Both bishops and theologians articulate, interpret and guide the faith-experiences of their communities and the people from the perspective of their rootedness in the Christian Tradition, and of the community's search for an ever more relevant and dynamic response to its joys and sorrows, hopes and anxieties.

24. Both bishops and theologians can fulfil their function only when their communities, recognizing their charisms and functions, are open and ready to change in order to improve their own quality of life and fulfil the mission of Christ more effectively. While the bishop's primary function in this context is to recognize and authenticate the rootedness of a particular faith-experience or faith-action of the community in Tradition, theologians explore the authenticity, width and depth of the Christian traditions lived by their community, take up new questions raised or faced by the community, and enable people to become ever more faithful and fruitful in living their Christian faith, and more creative and effective in fulfilling the mission of Jesus.

25. Since the context of the community continues to change and theologians begin to understand better and more critically the authenticity and limitation of every Christian tradition, they are deeply aware that every new situation raises new questions and may demand new answers. Throughout history, there have

been Christian teachings and practices of a particular time and community, which have developed into theories for larger communities and even the universal Church. These theories often outgrew their particular time and context. Theologians and bishops have to make their communities understand that they are both bound by the one Word of God which has been articulated in Scripture and Tradition through different theologies.

26. It is sad that today many communities are deprived of the richness and complementarity of different theologies, and therefore, are prevented from participating and exercising their responsibility to theologize according to the experience-reflection-action method in view of their Christian praxis and the fulfillment of their mission. For example, the contributions of eco-theology, feminist theology, ecumenical theology etc. have hardly found an echo in many a Christian community.

27. The theologian enables/facilitates the faith community to shape, influence and transform human persons in their varied tasks and responsibilities. In this way they serve the community and are entitled to enjoy whatever is necessary for the carrying out of their ministry.

28. In the first place, theologians accept their ministry in the Church as a gift of the Spirit for the building up of the community. With the Spirit as the source of their inspiration, theologians fulfil their responsibility of serving the People of God. This service presupposes recognition of and respect for the distinctive and indispensable role of the Magisterium.

29. New interpretations or conclusions are not to be rejected out of hand merely because they seem to be at variance with the accepted Church doctrine and practice. Rather such interpretations or conclusions should form the point of departure for dialogue between Magisterium and theologians.

30. At times theologians may find themselves in a conflict situation. In these circumstances they must be given a chance to reflect on their position not by methods of fear, force and coercion, but by providing fora where the Magisterium is given the opportunity to correct the theologian's opinion or profit by the newness of vision or insight their explanation reveals. The idea of setting up a Theological Commission to foster dialogue between

Magisterium and theologians is commendable. This Commission needs to be open not only to dialogue, but even more to the newness of understanding which comes in the wake of critical thinking and praxis-oriented reflection. Pluriform expressions of faith can be a sign of unity in diversity, since theologies can vary, even though the living commitment to the message of Jesus is one. For a dialogue and access to those in authority with whom they are in conflict are called for.

31. Undue pressure on theologians inhibits their creativity, critical sense and authentic devotedness. It will also signify the absence of true freedom in the Church. There cannot be conflicting opinions in the essentials of faith, and theologians will not contest this. However, it must be remembered that all theological language and symbols are time- and culture-bound. They call for interpretation and the theologian does just this.

Conclusion

32. We the Indian theologians feel ourselves called to a special mission, that of developing a theology meaningful to our situation. Such a theology is rooted in the soil of India and responds to the agonies and aspirations of the Indian people. Attempting to do this, we are aware that what we think and how we say it, may be often different from the traditional expressions of the same. Nevertheless, we are committed to make the Word of God more relevant and effective. We remain open to the Spirit speaking to us through the voices of our people and derive our strength through them. This is our humble contribution to the building up of a vibrant Church in India.

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